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PERFORMING A PRACTICE  
NARRATIVE TRANSLATION  
LIVE INSTALLATION · URBAN INTERVENTION

BY

ANYA ADELE LEWIN

PhD

2005



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**PERFORMING A PRACTICE:  
NARRATIVE • TRANSLATION •  
LIVE INSTALLATION • URBAN INTERVENTION**

by

**ANYA ADELE LEWIN**

A thesis submitted to the University of Plymouth  
in partial fulfilment for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

Department of Fine Art  
Dartington College of Arts

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Anya Adele Lewin

*Performing A Practice:*

*Narrative Translation Live Installation Urban Intervention*

**Abstract:**

This is a practice based PhD which follows several different lines of inquiry in order to pursue the ideas and territories which the practical works themselves lead to rather than imposing a question which the practical work had to speak to. The practical works are as much a part of the submission as the text and each chapter includes a DVD with either the work, or if it was site specific, the documentation. The text never seeks to explain the work but to expand and contextualise it. Although each chapter of the document is specific to a particular inquiry – mistranslation through subtitling, representations of the self through performance, art in public space, and artist-run exhibition initiatives, there are also threads that run throughout. Questions of identity can be read into all the work whether it be in the costumed performance or through questions about the identity of an artist or an audience within particular systems of distribution and in education. Although some of the work has been shown in a traditional gallery setting there is a concern for alternative modalities for presenting art and much of the work is situational and responsive to opportunity. This PhD is really an examination of how an artist thinks through practice and in the end I have sought to approach areas of interest and to open up questions without too much concern for finding closure in answers.



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## List of Works on DVDs

### *Mis-Translation as a Mode DVD*

1. *Grandma Baba and Little Boris*, collaboration with Lara Odell, single channel digital video, 20 minutes., 2000.
2. *Different Systems of Chaos*, collaboration with Steven Eastwood, single channel digital video, 27 minutes, 2003

### *Re/Presentation of the Self DVD*

1. Video and photographic documentation of *Bird Watching*, installation/performance at Hallwalls, Buffalo, NY, mixed media, 1998.
2. Video and photographic documentation of *In the Day the Bear Sleeps. In the Night the Bear Dreams I and II*, installation/performance mixed media at Dartington College of Arts Gallery , Totnes and Fix 02 Festival of Performance Art, Catalyst Arts, Belfast, 2002.
3. Video and photographic documentation of *The White Bear and Other Unwanted Thoughts*, collaboration with Lara Odell., mixed media installation and performance at CEPA Gallery Windows on Main Street, 2003.

### *Urban Intervention DVD*

1. Photographic and digital documentation of *Jumbo's Thick Skin*, installation on public bus in Buffalo, NY, 20 digital prints. 1999.
2. Photographic and video documentation of *HUMO* (Huge and Mobile images) with Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and Brain Massumi. Based at Ars Electronica, Linz, Austria, 2003.
3. Video documentation of bear videos being screened at *Out Video* International video art festival in public places, National Centre for Contemporary Art, Ekaterinburg, Russia, 2004.

### *Etc-Artists DVD*

1. Web Archive of *Cornershop* an exhibition/performance space, Buffalo, NY 1997 - 2000.
2. Documentation and Video from *Taxi Noir* a video installation created for Taxi Gallery, 2003.
3. Video Documentation of *The Bear Does Carolee*, 40-minute performance at

OMSK Roam, Geffrye Street, London, 2004.



## List of Illustrations

*Stop this Filth* video still of art critic intervention at the Tate Gallery 1999, Image provided by Simon Poulter p. 87

*Fuck Reality* video still of art critic intervention at the Tate Gallery 1999, Image provided by Simon Poulter p. 87

*I Painted my own Reality* video still of art critic intervention at the Tate Gallery 1999, Image provided by Simon Poulter p. 87

*Fifth Wall* video still of art critic intervention at the National Theatre 2001, Image provided by Simon Poulter p. 88

## Acknowledgements

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Since transferring to Dartington I have worked with Ric Allsopp who has given me invaluable assistance in shaping the structure of the document and enough room to find the PhD with my own process rather than imposing institutional formats and methodologies. I would also like to thank Mark Leahy for his detailed commentary on the drafts in progress and for many useful conversations.

While studying at SUNY at Buffalo my research was funded for two years by Teaching Assistantships in Video and for one year with a Teaching Assistantship in Composition. While studying at Dartington I have received, with great appreciation, a fee waiver. The University of Plymouth helped fund this study by affording me a three-month partial sabbatical from teaching, which was essential to completing the study.

I would also like to thank Simon Poulter for his constant encouragement, for the many conversations, which helped me shape my ideas, for reading the various drafts of the document, for assisting me in designing the DVDs and lastly for not laughing at me when I hid under the desk.

Finally I would like to dedicate this PhD to the memory of Robert Creeley. He always encouraged me in all of my endeavours, gave me heartfelt advice and support, and reminded me to only engage in the PhD if it was helpful and interesting to me as an artist and thinker.



### Author's Declaration

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Graduate Committee.

This study was financed with the aid of a teaching assistantship from State University of New York at Buffalo and a fee waiver from Dartington College of Arts.

A programme of advanced study, research and practice was undertaken, which included graduate course work in Philosophy, Poetics and Media Study at State University of New York at Buffalo as well as independent research and a series of practical works in different areas of contemporary art practice.

Relevant exhibitions, seminars, and conferences were regularly attended at which work was often presented. All of the practical work was presented in the public realm and several papers were prepared for publication.

### Publications (or presentation of other forms of creative and performing work):

2004

*Writing Space*, Fine Art Gallery, George Mason University, Washington D.C., USA. Catalogue.

*PARA SITES* Screening as part of an exhibition on site, displacement and the 'foreign body' curated by Brigid Mc leer Bridport Arts Centre, Bridport, UK.

*VIDEOMEDEJA 8th International Video Festival*, October 1-3, The Museum of Voivodina, Novi Sad, Serbia and Montenegro. Catalogue.

*OMSK ROAM*, Art not in a building. OMSK paves the way for a six hour collaborative event on Geffrye Street in London, UK.

*Out Video* International video art festival in public places, National Center for Contemporary Art, Ekaterinburg, Russia. Catalogue.

*Vilnius Film Festival*, Vilnius, Lithuania

*Text 04 Festival of Writers and New Writing*, Pheonix Arts Centre, Exeter England





LimeOMSK Film Video Performance Sound Mayhem Limehouse Town Hall,  
London, UK

2003

*Next Five Minutes Festival of Tactical Media*, Amsterdam, Holland.

CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, NY. *The White Bear and other Unwanted Thoughts*,  
collaboration with Lara Odell. Installation commissioned for gallery's windows  
on Main Street.

*Robert Beck Memorial Cinema* at Collective Unconscious, New York, NY.  
Screening of single channel videos with Lara Odell.

*Hallwalls*, Buffalo, NY. Screening of single channel videos with Lara Odell.

4 x4 at 291 Gallery, London UK, group screening and event.

Taxi Gallery, Cambridge, UK *Taxi Noir Slap Red* a site-specific video  
installation.

HUMO (Huge and Mobile images) with Rafael Lozano-Hemmer and Brian  
Masumi. Based at Ars Electronica, Linz, Austria. Created images which were  
projected on a large scale around the environs of Linz.

2002

*Trans-e-lation by the Tran-satlantic Journey*, Eds. Ric Allsopp and Caroline  
Bergvall, Performance Research, Vol. 7 No. 2, Summer 2002

Fix02 Biennial Festival of Performance Art, Catalyst Arts, Belfast, Northern  
Ireland. Catalogue. <http://www.catalystarts.org/fix02/>

EXAMINANTS Curated by Caroline Koebel Centro de Desarrollo de las Artes  
Visuales (CDAV) Habana Vieja, Cuba part of a screening of single channel  
videos.

*Augustart 2002*, Raw Space, New York, New York, curated by Melissa Uto

Dartington College of Arts Gallery, Totnes, Devon first performance/installation  
of *In the Day the Bear Sleeps, In the Night the Bear Dreams*. Commissioned for  
*Crossing Time* series. Curators Roger Bourke and Alan Boldon.

2001

*Infinite Fracture*, a web essay, Ed. Ann Vickery, How2, Vol. 1 no.5, March  
2001 [http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/stadler\\_center/how2/intro.html](http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/stadler_center/how2/intro.html)

MEDIATONIC: Pittsburgh Filmmakers 30 Year Celebration, Pittsburgh



Filmmakers, Pittsburgh, PA.

*The Film Society*, Massachusetts College of Art, curator Saul Levine, Boston, MA.

*Open Source: Artists from the Institute of Electronic Art*, The Central Academy of Fine Arts. Beijing, China. Catalogue.

*Pandaemonium: Biennial of Moving Images*, The Lux Centre, London, England. Catalogue.

*Festival of Actual Kino*, Novosibirsk, Russia

Prize: Best Folklore Experiment for *Grandma Baba and Little Boris*

*Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin* Paris March 2-16 2001 Berlin June 7-17 2001. Catalogue.

2000

Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers, *Buffalo Showcase*, curator Julie Zando, Hallwalls, Buffalo, NY

1999

*Ruins in Reverse: Time and Progress in Contemporary Art* curator Lawrence Brose, Commissioned to do bus show for Buffalo Metro System, CEPA Gallery, Buffalo, NY. Catalogue.

*Things Do not Connect; They Correspond*, Guest Ed. Chris Alexander, Jacket # 7, April 1999, <http://www.jacket.zip.com.au/jacket07/index.html>

1998

*Relay: Drawn to Readymade*, an international exhibition of installation art curator Sarah Kellner, Hallwalls, Buffalo, NY.

**Presentation and Conferences Attended:**

2005

(Inter-)facing: Theory and Practice, University of Exeter Presentation: *Subtitling: Mistranslation as a Mode and the Third Text*

2004

*Art: What's it good for?* Two days of talks, screenings, arguments and debates asking what is socially engaged art practice now? Organised by Tracey Warr and Roddy Hunter. Dartington College of Art, Totnes, UK.

2003

SUNY at Buffalo, Department of Art, part of the Visual Studies Speakers' series.



Word count of main body of thesis: 36,217

Signed *Amey R. Levin*  
Dated *1/04/06*



## Some Suggestions for Reading and Viewing this PhD

Each of the chapters includes a DVD, and although I would not expect to control how the reader moves through this document I offer these suggestions as the writer and maker of this work. In Chapters one and two I propose that the reader view the work presented on the DVD before reading the texts and in Chapters three and four that the work be viewed as the reader goes through the texts.





## Introduction

In an essay on the problems of academic conservatism in the teaching of Humanities in American higher education the poet and critic Charles Bernstein wrote:

But as history is written by the victors, so art (as a matter of professional imperatives) is taught by the explainers...It need not be so, for we are professors and not deducers: our work is as much to promote as to dispel, to generate as much as document. I am not - I know it sounds as if I am - professing the virtue of art over the deadness of criticism, but rather the aversion of virtue that is a first principle of the arts and an inherent, if generally discredited, possibility for the humanities.

(Bernstein, 1997: 179)

A practice-based PhD follows this line of thinking and validates the possibility that artistic practice itself can be a critical investigation. This is a practice-based PhD and rather than posing a clear question at the beginning of the research and having one enquiry, into which I fit all the work, I wanted to investigate how an artist thinks through practice. I have used the work itself to find the questions and ideas I am exploring, struggling with, building upon, playing with, but hopefully never illustrating in a body of work made from 1997 to 2004<sup>1</sup>. As much as I have used the practical work as a jumping point off into the text, I have also used it as a limitation. None of the texts I have written claim to develop a full study but rather to contextualise and place the practical work within contemporary debates. I have not tried to discuss and illuminate every single element that I have placed or see in the practical work in the assumption that as part of this submission it is present and not everything needs to be

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<sup>1</sup> I have not included everything I made during this period but have chosen particular works that address the ideas that I wanted to further elucidate in the texts and which show the diversity of my practice during this period.

explained. The text sits along side the work, not as explanation, but as an expansion. As a maker of the work and a writer of these texts, I never imagine that I have complete authority in creating the meaning. "The spectator makes the picture" (as quoted in Ball and Kanfo, 1988: 115) Duchamp once said; " No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener" (1968: 69) wrote Walter Benjamin. How can we bring these statements together? Of course we needn't try, but I do not find them in polar opposition. No poem might be intended for a reader yet it is the reader who brings it to life and the writer cannot control this new writing of her poem. Each time a work finds an audience it is rewritten, revisualised and reinscribed by the viewer, as she creates her own walk through the work that has been offered. I am not trying to avoid responsibility for the content but to acknowledge I cannot completely control reception.

There are four sections in the PhD document. The first explores the idea of mistranslation through subtitling in two collaborative single channel videos; the second looks at issues of identity through examining three installations and performances in which I, and in one instance a collaborator, perform as animals; the third, taking as a starting point three public projects I participated in, examines questions about visual work placed in public space and asks if art can change the space of advertising; the fourth section concentrates on Cornershop a gallery/exhibition/performance/studio space, which I initiated and ran for three years in Buffalo, NY, and discusses the role of an artist who



develops exhibition spaces or events and the ideology and politics involved. In the first two sections, I stayed close to the work and reflected back on it through texts I read. They are more intimate than the last two sections, which concentrate on ideas about work in the public sphere. In the spirit of a more public examination I have brought in other people's works and related projects in order to compare, contrast and raise questions.

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I don't mean a set of philosophical issues that one applies to a discussion of the subject but rather an attitude of enquiry, a manner of listening, a mode of recognising what is significant and proceeding from there to identifying networks of significance.

(Bernstein, 1997: 178)

There are themes, methodologies and recognisable voices throughout this PhD but it is eclectic. The sections are organised with the projects grouped in order to point to common themes, but again this in no way is supposed to fully define the practical work and some of the pieces have elements which cross over into different sections. I hope the reader may make some of her or his own links throughout the reading and viewing of this work. For example *The White Bear and Other Unwanted Thoughts* took place in windows on Main Street in Buffalo, NY and so had a face in public space – this is an element of the work, and issues discussed in the section on work in public space would certainly relate, but I have decided to concentrate on questions of identity, performance, and



animal and human boundaries. In fact the bear wanders through several parts of this PhD beginning as a character portrayed by a dog in *Grandma Baba and Little Boris*, with various incarnations emerging in installations, projected across buildings, and broadcast on public video screens in Ekaterinburg, Russia. Another linkage can be found in the video *Different Systems of Chaos* and some of the concerns I write about in *Etc Artist* particularly around the professionalisation of the artist as administrator.

Questions of identity appear throughout the work – whether it is the identity of nationality, language, religion, gender, artist or curator or administrator, audience or producer. There is a certain irreverence, mixed-up metaphors and failed transformations, which I hope, help to probe what makes up identity as well as support the idea of a multiplicity of elements which are part of what constitutes identity. I do not understand identity to be a singular definable element of an individual so seek to problematise ideas of the self. In *Grandma Baba and Little Boris* Little Boris holds an egg in one hand and a potato in the other. They are about the same shape and size. Grandma Baba says:

There are things you must know. The egg and the potato are not of the same family.

(Lewin and Odell, 2000)

This is a conversation during a scene where they are making Jewish Easter eggs. There is a visual joke but also a serious question about what connects people.

There is costuming in much of the work but none of it seeks to completely obscure what is underneath. By performing characters, which I can't really completely inhabit, I bring the attention back to my own representation. In truth I am uncomfortable with being photographed or filmed as my "real" self. I have no problem playing to a camera, which I have some control over, if I am in costume. After viewing *Grandma Baba and Little Boris* and documentation of the different bear projects I can see similarities between Grandma Baba and the brown bear. They both have the same slow melancholy walk and in both it is hard to see where the costume ends and the body begins. Grandma Baba is clearly a woman, while the gender of the bear can't really be read, but an obscuring of the female body perhaps drives both images.

Performance and public spectacle are an aspect of all the works discussed. *Grandma Baba and Little Boris* and *Different Systems of Chaos* are presented as single channel video works, but they were both shot by improvising performances for the camera. The performances, encounters we had during them, and process of making them were as much a part of the work as the edits I am submitting. Every event at Cornershop, whether it was a poetry reading, music, visual art, film screenings, or a smorgasbord of all of the above was a one-night performance. It only became an art venue on the nights it performed the social encounter of art. *Bird Watching*, *In the Day the Bear Sleeps In the Night the Bear Dreams* and *The White Bear and other Unwanted Thoughts* all have performances embedded in them, and of all the work evoke the most



traditional understanding of performance in visual art. *HUMO*, involved the quick fire projection of images onto surfaces in and around Linz, Austria. No image was permanently attached to any surface and it was a performative act, which beyond the short time of its projection, has only circulated through documentation. Rather than solely submitting the images I made during the workshop I am including the whole experience as a way of informing my understanding of art in the public sphere. In fact all of the practical work included in this submission has been presented in a public environment, and much of it outside the traditional gallery. A question of who the public is, and how work finds an audience is embedded throughout this PhD. *HUMO* was an expensive project, using monumental images in public spaces, yet its main audience was the fourteen artists involved. It was of course seen by many more but they were an incidental audience and looking through the video documenting the event one senses a private feel to a public situation.

*Cornershop* was a successful attempt to activate a "company"<sup>2</sup> and create a space that when it occurred, was an event itself, which would generate an

---

<sup>2</sup> Company was a favourite term of Robert Creeley, a friend and supporter of *Cornershop*. In an interview with Bruce Jackson on his sense of the word company he tells this story:

Oh, company. I remember, for example, a couple years ago when I was trying to persuade graduate students in our Poetics program to let me get them some kind of a digs in the city that would let them have more, not just presence in the city, but let them be more in the city as its information and daily business. I said, you know, "You need company", et cetera et cetera. I kept talking about company. "You gotta have company." One of the terrific women in the group, Anya Lewin no less, who actually did eventually establish such a place, she said, "I thought when you said company you were talking about a small business that you wanted to start." I said, "No, no, no another kind of company." And break bread together. (Creeley, 2005)



audience that would cross over in its interests. *Jumbo's Thick Skin* was made with "the public" in mind. It was to be viewed by anyone who got on the bus in Buffalo, New York. By the end of this project I came to understand the larger the audience in mind, the less control and feedback for the producer of the work. I have no idea how the six thirty-second bear videos that were shown on eight screens across Ekaterinburg, Russia were understood. Were they read as visual entertainment, art, an oddity, a commercial, or something else or even barely registered? *Different Systems of Chaos* was made without any particular audience in mind and has shown internationally at screenings and film festivals, but its most successful viewing space was the Internet where it was used as an activist tool to stop the closing of the school featured in the film.<sup>3</sup> Paralleling my conclusion that there is not one way of understanding or defining identity, I realise there is no one public. Everything is affected by context – political, geographical and historical, the ambition of distribution, and chance. A giant projection on the side of a building can feel private, while a movie viewed at 320 x 240 pixels on a personal computer screen can motivate discernable effects in the public sphere.

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The totalizing belief that social and aesthetic values are encoded in the being of gifted individuals (rather than emerging from a process of becoming shared by group members) is cultivated early in cultural education.

(Critical Art Ensemble, 2003: 2)

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<sup>3</sup> Please see Appendix A in order to see the letters of support the film generated.

Collaboration is a key element of my practice and several of the works submitted as part of this PhD are collaborations. *Cornershop* and *HUMO* are part of a group process. I worked with Lara Odell on *Grandma Baba and Little Boris* and *The White Bear and other Unwanted Thoughts*. *Different Systems of Chaos* was co-written and directed with Steven Eastwood. The work I made with both of them sprang from an intimate space of friendship, playfulness, and mutual respect. There is no clear division of authorship but a blending of sensibilities and ideas, and working collaboratively offered me a way of expanding my creative space and sharing visual and critical ideas. I could not have made any of the collaborative works by myself and I am sure that both Eastwood and Odell would not have made the videos and installations we did working as individuals. Through a shared process we were able to produce something both familiar and unknown to ourselves. The texts I have submitted which accompany the collaborative work are my own, and happily I imagine that Eastwood and Odell might have very different takes on the work had they authored the texts. I don't think they would disagree with what I have written but they might emphasise different elements. I don't claim an overarching authority on either the motivation or the theoretical placement of the work but offer my readings and memories of making the work.

In the beginning of *The Postmodern Condition* by J. F. Lyotard he advises:

The author of this report is a philosopher not an expert. The latter knows what he knows; the former does not. One concludes the other questions.  
(Lyotard, as quoted in Baker, 2000: 39)



I am neither an expert nor a philosopher but I hope, as an artist who has engaged in PhD research, I have explored debates pertinent to current contemporary art practice and that I have asked questions about that practice that open up possibilities in the field.

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DVD



CAUTION –  
DO NOT USE  
DAMAGED CDs



## Chapter 1: Mis-translation as a Mode

Mis-translation has been a method I have used in the production of my own films as a way of experimenting with constructions of voice. In every day conversation I recognise the presence of histories, fragmented stories, cultural connections and disconnections. There are parts of our identity, which exist in suppressed languages, in the gap between our mother tongues, adopted and forgotten languages. I imagine (mis)translation as a way of recognising the layers and limits of language. I am not recommending it as a method for all subtitles but rather am arguing for an acknowledgement of the complex process and authorship involved in subtitling. I am interested in the way that subtitling recognises the viewer as a reader both of the text inscribed on the film and of the film as a whole. In allowing the translation to be present we let multiple languages exist together rather than one overriding the other which points to a politics of difference where understanding could occur without claiming an equivalence of experience.

The myth of translation is that it is a process that gives equivalence from one language to another. In literary translation into English the current mode is to use a word count in the translation equal to the original. One word means the same as another.

The practice of subtitling has been even more obscured than the translation of written, printed texts. Indeed, most people probably have

never thought of subtitling as translation. There is no question that English-language criticism about foreign cinema has taken the mediation of subtitles entirely for granted. Almost nothing has been written about them.  
(Nornes, 1999)

In film translations the idea of a translation is barely recognised even though subtitles take many liberties. They are constructed to keep pace with the dialogue. Each written sentence should last about the length of the speech.

#### Subtitling Rules:

1 character per 2 frames, less than 40 characters per line (spaces and punctuation included), no more than two lines per subtitle, and never go over a cut unless absolutely forced to.

(Behar, 2004: 81)

Anyone who has watched a foreign film and been able to understand both the language of its origin and the subtitles imprinted on the film knows that there is usually a gap between the two. The subtitles give the gist of the dialogue but don't have time for every detail. And then occasionally subtitles offer too much information changing a subtle moment into something quite direct.

In an interview between Atom Egoyan and Claire Dennis they discuss a scene in her film *Friday Night* where one character is in a car outside in a café watching a man speaking to a girl playing pinball. One can hardly hear the dialogue in French but when watching a subtitled version it is absolutely clear what is being said. The nuances of translation are ignored – only the meaning of the words are translated rather than taking in the context of the scene.

I was actually against that. I asked the guy who did the subtitles if we could perhaps print them with one letter missing or one word missing – as



artists you know...And he said that that doesn't exist in subtitles. Either we have subtitles or we don't have subtitles.

*So why did we need to subtitle the scene?*

I don't know I was too weak to say. . . But it was the first time I worked with the guy who did subtitles. Usually I work with another person. And probably I was afraid I didn't trust myself enough to have it without subtitles. That's something I regret now.

(Dennis interviewed by Egoyan, 2004: 75)

Making subtitles a central element in the consideration of a film can open a relationship or space between the translated text inscribed onto the screen and the spoken sound, creating an opening for what might be thought of as a third text – one that is neither fully in the language of the original nor completely belonging to the language of translation.

The foreignness of the foreign text can never be manifested directly, in its own terms, but only indirectly in the terms of a translation...

(Venuti, 2002: 9)

When translating a text or a film it is usually to enable a new audience (market) to access the work. Subtitles can invoke ideological differences between the culture of the production and the culture of the reception. A translator may rework the text to recognise the language and culture of the new audience. The subtitles might look foreign to the image. A film is shot in China yet the subtitles are anglophied. An English speaking audience could recognise a way of phrasing things common to British English while seeing images of China and hearing the sound of Chinese being spoken. An American-speaking viewer would have the further experience of reading an English that was slightly



foreign. At the same time as the subtitles are translating the dialogue they are also allowing the viewer to recognise the experience of translation.

The translating process usually involves a simultaneous loss and gain. It is in fact this loss and gain that defines the peculiar second-order status of a translation, its relative autonomy.

(Venuti, 2002: 6)

It is the rare text, mostly done with poetry, which prints a translation next to the work it is translating – so offering the visual experience of this loss and gain, but films, which are subtitled, allow for this experience. The text inscribed onto the image becomes part of the image and is read, if one chooses to read it, in relation to the sound of the image. One usually assumes a truth to the translation, that the words given are those being said. Subtitles subtly ask who is giving voice to whom? Which language has authority? The one spoken or the one written? Are they really equal? Who is the audience meant to be? Walter Benjamin asked “Is a translation meant for readers who do not understand the original?” What if a translation is meant to destabilise any idea of an original?

It is World War 1 The soldiers in the trench are exhausted – dazed, confused their faces covered with mud 9 (courtesy of max factor) It is the last minute of calm before the climactic battle. Suddenly, a whirr. Faint at first, but growing stronger. One soldier takes a peek: “tanks, tanks!” he shouts. At the bottom of the screen, the French subtitles blared: “*Merci, Merci!*”

(Behar, 2004: 81)

When films are dubbed any sense of the rhythms, sounds and construction of the original language, which also conveys meaning, is lost. The effect can be comical. Dubbing is more popular in certain countries than others and certain

actors are dubbed by one particular voice – so, for instance, Arnold Schwarzenegger always has the same Italian voice and thus a real substitution is made. The practice of dubbing does point to the state of translation of a film, as it always has a feeling of being slightly off. But by stripping away the sound of the language being spoken the possibility of being in two states at once is taken away. Interestingly, although it is institutionally a monolingual culture, American audiences don't respond well to dubbed films, but neither are subtitled films well favoured (although this is changing)

In *Grandma Baba and Little Boris* there is no sync sound. When Grandma Baba speaks the words tumble out of sync. The voice of Grandma Baba is the voice of my own grandmother. Each time we shot we would telephone either my or my collaborator Lara Odell's grandmother and I would learn how to say a few phrases for the particular scene. In editing this sound was stripped off and the voice of my grandmother was dubbed over. The voice heard is obviously not the voice of the representation. If the sound is dubbed in why are subtitles used? What was the language of origin? Are the two texts completely different? As the viewer begins to be aware of the mismatching taking place hopefully s/he will begin to ask these questions while becoming more aware of her own role as a viewer.

American audiences generally don't want to go to the movies to read. They'd rather the experience flow over them, be spoon-fed rather than interactive. Reading dialogue takes them out of the movie, they say, shattering the illusion.

(Rich, 2004: 162)

B. Ruby Rich argues against the idea that it's the difficulty of reading which hurts subtitled films marketability in the US pointing to the extreme popularity with which people have taken up text based communication – texting, instant messaging, email etc - she wonders if foreign films give too much evidence for the North American audience that the world is not actually made in their image. She is hopeful that the recent success of some subtitled films has opened up the mainstream market to subtitled films.

I hope it's not too big a leap to imagine the resurgence of subtitles, also, as an incipient anti-war gesture. Subtitles allow us to hear other people's voices intact and give us full access to their subjectivity. Subtitles acknowledge that our language, the language of the place in which we are watching this film, is only one of many languages in the world, and at that very moment, elsewhere they are watching movies in which characters speak in English while other languages spell out their thoughts and emotions across the bottom of the frame for other audiences.

(Rich, 2004: 168)

I would argue that rather than access to full subjectivity that subtitles gives an audience access to being in the space of translation and emphasizes the idea that communication is never complete and exists in two or more places at once.

The foreignness is not made ours, on the contrary, in subtitles, what is ours, our own language, is made foreign.

(Sinha, 2004: 189)

If you live in a house of many languages, some more comprehensible than others, the familiar can be foreign at the same time. During the production of





Grandma Baba I had recorded my grandmother reading a voice-over we had written. It was a series of fragments and I did not keep track of what was what. When we placed the sound of her speaking in particular scenes we did not know what she was saying and we cut the sound for the pace of the scene. The men's voices were taken from a Russian language tape – again we edited it for the sound rather than the meaning. There is part of our tale we as authors cannot access but a Russian speaker would have a different experience of the video should they chose to follow the Russian speech.

Language is appropriated, taken apart, and then put back together with a new reflection, an unexpected accent, a further twist in the tale.

(Chambers, 1994: 23)

We wrote the subtitles onto the image. We borrowed from many sources and mixed them as we saw fit. The tales of Baba Yaga, other Russian Fairy Tales, the communist manifesto, and lyrics from Russian songs were some of our sources. The English is imprinted onto the imagery as an authoritative voice while at the same time it is questioned, as there is a constant slippage. The sound does not match the image and so the text might not match the sound. The intertextuality provides a constantly moving voice. A viewer might recognise a typical phrase from a Russian tale such as "the vodka did not go into his mouth but ran down his chin" and begin to understand the subtitles as a pastiche or reorganisation of given sources.

Translatability (problematizing it) becomes a vital aspect of the structure . . . The intricacies of such disruptive, uprooted dealings inevitably add humorous correspondences to the work. Nothing equals



another thing equals another equals another.

(Bergvall, 1999: 3)

Buffalo looks like images of Russia. We picked locations that we envisioned as sets. We wanted to bring Buffalo to life as Russia. We would go to a location, for example the abandoned train station, and we would frame shots so that they weren't clearly recognisable – so Russia was in the frame and Buffalo was out of the frame. We began to pick locations and props as stand-ins for particular ideas and places in Russia. An odd statue toppled in front of the train station, which looked half alien half soviet, became the toppled monuments of Soviet style communism. In a graveyard we found Lenin's tomb. A newly built apartment block was the endless rows of block housing built during communism. We did not need to build sets we only had to inhabit locations. Representation is constantly questioned with one thing standing in for another.

Postproduction artists invent new uses for work including audio or visual forms of the past, within their own constructions. But they also re-edit historical or ideological narratives, inserting the elements that compose them into alternative scenarios.

(Bourriaud 2002: 39)

We shot over eight hours of material and also consider the events themselves as part of the project. In fact we only stopped shooting and performing because it became obvious that there was no natural stopping place. Baba and Boris could be placed in endless situations and could appear and reappear endlessly; there was no clear narrative path and so there were no limitations. One day we decided to stop the performances and to gather our material together to see

what we could construct. We decided to use the subtitles and inter-titles as a way to weave the fragments together. We weren't concerned about a correct translation. Both of us had grown up hearing Russian spoken without being able to decipher the meaning. Comprehension is not the only manner in which language and culture is passed on.

The loss occurs because translating is radically decontextualising. . .  
At the same time, however a gain occurs because translating is radically recontextualising, actually exorbitant in its creation of another context.  
(Venuti 2002: 7)

It was not only the equation of sound to meaning that we played with in *Grandma Baba and Little Boris* but also that of symbol to meaning. Baba and Boris make Jewish Easter eggs. Little Boris is an androgynous figure; Grandma Baba whose name translates to Grandma Grandma is obviously young. We wanted to complicate the making of identity, the fetishizing of tradition, and the telling of a story. It wasn't a shameless post-modern grab bag of whatever sources we wanted without any understanding of context or history but rather a reworking of material that was both part of personal family histories and collective history. Through humour that bordered on nostalgia and inappropriate stereotyping, we both referenced and remade at the same time. The humour arrives in the constant mismatching. What emerges is that there is no one text, no original, but layers of construction.

The artwork represents the site of negotiation between reality and fiction, narrative and commentary.

(Bourriaud 2002: 41)



The ethics of translation become particularly important in the documentary setting. Words spoken belong to someone rather than a character being portrayed. People are performing themselves or a point of view they want to get across. Of course it is not only the translation of the spoken word that can change the meaning of someone's words or actions. Editing can alter timeframes, references, and the context of events.

*Different System of Chaos* takes this notion of reconstruction as its starting point. The film makes no claims to objectivity but looks to construct itself as a translation. It does not present itself as a documentary but as a performance of itself. It was shot over 4 days in Lithuania at an art school for 12 to 18 year olds. It was a collaborative experience in which all involved performed themselves. The only costuming involved was in the subtitles. Again through a mis- (or loose) translation we allowed the translation to expose our cultural presence rather than block it with any pretence of equivalence.

A real translation is transparent, it does not cover the original, does not block its light . . .

(Benjamin 1968: 79)

The slips in translation are made explicit. Several minutes into the video the following inter-title appears:

Translators note:

There was no translator.





(Subtitles approximate what might have been said.)

(Eastwood and Lewin, 2003)

This offers the viewer who understands both Lithuanian and English an explanation and the English speaker is given a way of 'reading' the video. We had discussed the use of mistranslated subtitles with Redas Dirzys (an artist and the Director of the school) who had liked the idea and was a willing participant. It felt important to acknowledge that we as visitors could not understand Lithuanian and to try and achieve a balance of destabilising any clear notion of fiction or documentary while showing respect to the participants in the video.

An experience, which is made up of several languages at once, can contain linguistic mishaps and the story of political and economic crossings. Can a translation also include what has been left out? Does the viewer or reader of a work engage in a form of translation? Is the inscription of a subtitle always a direct address to audience? As English becomes the language of global exchange whose English does one address?

*As Different Systems of Chaos* was shot in Lithuania, and neither Steven Eastwood nor I speak Lithuanian, this was an experience of constant translation. Lithuanian is a language spoken by very few people outside of Lithuania. Under Soviet domination Russian was taught in all the schools and much of Russian culture was brought to the country. Lithuanian and especially its songs conveyed a language of resistance. Since the Soviets left Lithuania in 1991 Russian is no

longer taught in the schools and English is the choice of most students for their second language. English is a language of access to ideas and dialogues with parts of the world Lithuanians were denied contact with while at the same time it is a language that delivers the ideology of global capitalism. Each language that is spoken holds in it the context of its time and locality.

The students at Alytaus Dailes Mokykla are aged 12 to 18. They either were very young when the Soviets left or didn't experience the occupation at all. The older generation has a complex relationship to Russia and its language that the younger generation has no direct access to. The reminders of the Soviet presence in Lithuania are strong; in the bleak architecture built during the Soviet time; in the monuments to resistance, in the blank spaces where statues no longer stand; and most strangely in the theme park of Soviet statues in Grutas where you can wander around a wooded area visiting a myriad of Lenin and Stalin statues<sup>1</sup> while listening to Russian music being piped through old fashioned soviet public address systems set on prison guard towers. You can end your visit by eating in an authentic Russian restaurant.

What if there is no uninterrupted inheritance that reaches into the present from the past, but instead bits and pieces that exist in our presence not as traces, as residues, of a unique tradition but as elements of different histories that are continually being recomposed.

(Chambers 1994: 102)

During the Soviet occupation information and contact from outside of the communist world was censored for ideological reasons; now economic conditions hinder the flow of materials. There are not many books at the

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<sup>1</sup> The images of the Lenin and Stalin statues that appear in the video were shot there.



Alytus Dalies Mokykla and only one copy of *Art and Theory* 1900 to 1990.

To use a product is to betray its concept. To read, to view, to envision a work is to know how to divert it: use is an act of micropirating that constitutes postproduction. We never read a book the way an author would like us to.

(Bourriaud 2002: 18)

Ironically, although unwelcome during Soviet times, many of the essays included in the collection are Marxist in flavour. They are also not of great interest in the present. In the video a wandering camera opens closed doors to find groups of students inhabiting different classrooms. There is no teacher in sight as they read each other Adorno and Althusser in English. What is the reading of this reading, which although happening completely in English holds both the original language of the texts and the Lithuanian of the students?

This is to locate the strength of a translation in its abuses. Where an original text strains language through textual knots dense with signification, the translation performs analogous violence against the target language. Corrupt subtitlers disavow the violence of the subtitle while abusive translators revel in it.

(Nornes, 1999)

Both *Grandma Baba and Little Boris* and *Different Systems of Chaos* use this abuse in order to illuminate the presence of translation. The subtitles, written directly onto the images during the editing process, simultaneously suture and rupture a viewer's experience. It is the subtitles, as an imposed text, which brings a structure to the fragments that make up both videos. Yet at the same

time the subtitles address the presence of the "untranslatable" of that which is not being passed on. What can't be told becomes a presence. The subtitles have a mind of their own and do not adhere to any one voice. The admission of mistranslation addresses the controlling hand of the director/editor/writer while at the same time, especially in *Different Systems of Chaos*, acknowledging that there is an element of the experience that cannot be controlled, as much of the language is not understood by the authors/translators.

The additional programming that has to be typed in order to code any non-standard (ie non-English) signs for use on the internet is a painful (and uncommented on) reminder of the cost of such linguistic supremacy.  
(Allsopp and Bergvall, 2002: 2)

Sometimes the abuse is not through the skill of the translator. The titler in Final Cut Express<sup>2</sup> would not permit accents so I had to draw the accents onto the Lithuanian titles in Photoshop and many mistakes were made. A Lithuanian viewer of *Different Systems of Chaos* would certainly find the subtitles foreignized. In this case it probably adds happily to the confusion, pointing to the disconnectedness of the videomakers to the Lithuanian language, while asking questions about the English translation. But unhappily it was impossible to put the accents on the names of the participants in the credits. This felt quite sad to me, as if in the misspelling of the name, we weren't fully acknowledging the person.

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<sup>2</sup> The editing software we used.



No translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original.

(Benjamin 1968: 73)

The visual language of film is an additional element that the language of the translation must work with and against. What information is being conveyed through the visuals, what does the subtitles' placement literally block out?

Subtitles are not transparent. How does the film translator make best use of her mediating role? And what of a work which includes translation in its origin? Not only if it uses multiple languages but even in the view of considering a film or a video as a translation of process and collective effort.

Both *Different Systems of Chaos* and *Grandma Baba and Little Boris* were collaborations. If one thinks about translation as exchange rather than equivalence it significantly broadens the territory that can be thought of in terms of translation and could be a useful way of thinking about collaboration itself. Ideas are discussed and developed; different styles and strengths are combined; narrative constructions are merged; compromises are made. What I make in a collaboration I could never make on my own. Again, an experience of loss and gain.

Neither *Grandma Baba* nor *Different Systems* came from a script and there was no clear end envisioned. What is exciting about thinking about the work itself as a translation of process is the idea that this is just one outcome, one way of





constructing the material. Editing itself can be thought of as both a sculpting and translating tool.

A translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as its afterlife.

(Benjamin 1968: 71)

There could be other versions made, new translations, which emphasised elements that were left out in these first works. Even if there never is both videos give the sensibility that the fragments have been ordered to give an experience, which could be reorganised, reconstructed, translated again.



## Addendum

In May of 2004 Redas Dirzys wrote me that the Alytus Dailies Mokykla, where *Different Systems of Chaos* was shot, was under threat of closure because of a reorganisation scheme. I was very upset about this and suggested that we start an international protest campaign. Redas was already working to keep the school opened in Lithuania and was more than willing to go international. I created a website [www.yesandnu.com/Alytus.html](http://www.yesandnu.com/Alytus.html) where the film *Different Systems of Chaos* could be viewed and from which letters of support could be e-mailed. Redas wrote a letter describing the situation, in which he focused not on the issue of the school closing, but of bureaucrats imposing reorganisation schemes without full knowledge of what they were doing. I put the letter on the website and also emailed it to international listservs and to people I knew. We received about 15 letters of support, all which were translated into Lithuanian and published in the Alytus Daily Newspaper. The authorities were shocked at the international attention that the issue received and the plans to close the school were dropped. Please see Appendix A in order to read Redas' letters and a sample of some of the letters of support that were received.



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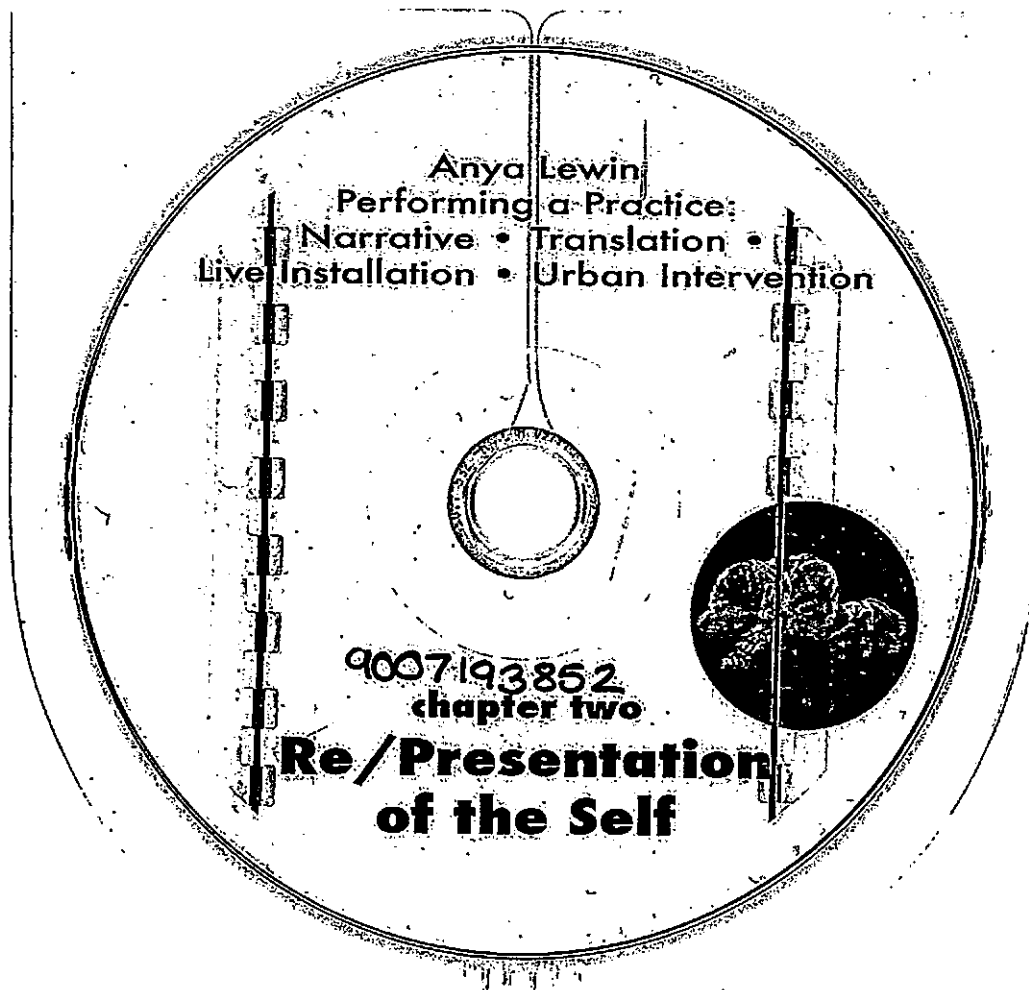
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## Chapter 2: Re/Presentation of the Self

Somehow it's sometimes hard to be a human.  
Arms and Legs get often in the way,  
making oneself a bulky, awkward burden.

(Creeley, 1999)

Is putting on a costume getting into something else's skin? What does it mean to be a bear or a bird? What does it mean to fail to be a bear or a bird? Why try something impossible?

To the extent that I could look and behave like a wasp or a bat without changing my fundamental structure, my experiences would not be anything like the experiences of those animals.

(Nagel: 1973)

I cannot understand the conscious experience of anyone else, much less a being with a different physiological structure. In enacting an impossible transformation a space of questioning is opened up. I am something that I am not so what am I?

Reflection on what it is like to be a bat seems to lead us, therefore, to the conclusion that there are facts that do not consist in the truth of propositions expressible in a human language.

(Nagel: 1973)

In costume one is much more aware of oneself. I try to make my inside fit the outside. This causes a feeling of blankness and melancholy. I feel different. I do not adopt the point of view of a bear but I am not exactly myself. I cannot become a bear; I can only become a person being a bear. A bear-like costume can signify my beariness but it does not take away my humanness. This is an interesting space. A gap. A transformation is pointed to but not fully made.

Becomings-animal are neither dreams nor phantoms. They are perfectly real. But which reality is at issue here. For if becoming animal does not consist in playing animal or imitating an animal, it is clear that the human being does not 'really' become an animal anymore than the animal





'really' becomes something else. Becoming produces nothing other than itself.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 249)

If a metaphor says two different things are similar does it emphasise the union between them and erase what is dissimilar? If a metaphor means to cross over does one leave the original image behind? In the language of moving image one can create a metaphor either through cutting two images together or dissolving them into each other. If I wanted to say a woman is like a bear or a bird I would cut a sequence, which either juxtaposed a woman and a bear doing very similar things, or dissolve a shot of a bird into a woman.

Performance Art which traces its history back through visual art rather than theatre tends to shy away from acting and lean towards representation and actions within a situation. In my work as a bear and a bird I was not interested in transforming into a bear or a bird through acting but through creating an image which could represent a bear and a bird at the same time that it represented a failure to fully do so. A costume, which both exposes humanness and creates beariness or birdness is not working metaphorically. It is being a bird or a bear while not being able to be a bear nor a bird. "Being expresses in a single meaning all that differs." (Deleuze and Guattari: 254) It is a being that is neither here nor there, where difference is emphasised. When looking at the image of the bear figure or the bird figure one sees both a bear and a human figure and a bird and a female figure. The presentation of self is questioned.

Identity emerges in the failure of the body to express being fully and the failure of the signifier to convey meaning exactly.

(Phelan, 1996: 13)

A transformation can create a sense of discomfort or slight disbelief because of the image of the self that can't quite be disguised. There is no singular image, no singular self. In *Birdwatching* painting my body, wearing a beak (even one that constantly fell off), flapping my arms, and making bird sounds were enough to be read and treated as a bird. Still there was a displacement or a gap (woman)



between the presentation of myself as a generic bird and the idea of a bird. The image of the bird stops it from being fully woman while the image of the woman stops it from being fully bird.

Identity is perceptible only through a relation to an other – which is to say, it is a form of both resisting and claiming the other, declaring the boundary where the self diverges from and merges with the other. In that declaration of identity and identification, there is always loss, the loss of not being the other and yet remaining dependent on that other for self-seeing self-being.

(Phelan, 1996: 13)

When the other is an animal the boundary is emphasised.

the animal is a reminder of the limits of human understanding and influence but also of the value of working at those limits.

(Baker, 2000: 18)

We know that animals have consciousness, that there is something to be that thing, but we have no access to the subjectivity of that being, not even through empathy. Of course we do not have access to another humans' subjective experience but we do have more possibility of some kind of empathetic understanding of human experience.

If the facts of experience about what it is like for the experiencing organism are accessible only from one point of view, then it is a mystery how the true character of experience could be revealed in the physical operation of that organism.

(Nagel: 1973)

When Joseph Beuys made *Coyote: I Like America and America Likes Me* he was interested in "recreating an all-encompassing unity between material and spiritual, human, animal and vegetable realms." (Beuys, X) By being in the cage with the coyote he was seeking communion with the animal world. The coyote represented the forgotten powers and energies of the animal kingdom. Beuys saw "America's "psychological trauma point" (Beuys 142) as its relationship



with the Native American and picked the coyote as a symbol of that troubled relationship.<sup>3</sup>

Why do I work with animals to express invisible powers? You can make these energies very clear if you enter another kingdom that people have forgotten.

(Beuys, 1993: 142 )

Although I am unsure about some of Beuys' terms such as "unity", and wonder if it isn't more productive to find a way to appreciate dis-unity, I like this work very much. I was able to view film documentation of *I Like America, and America Likes Me* at the Tate Modern in 2005 and was struck by both the humour and intensity of the encounter which Beuys set up between himself, the coyote and the audience who viewed them through a chain link fence. I wonder what Beuys meant by "if you enter another kingdom?" Did he mean by the Coyote entering an Art gallery or his engagement with animals he was entering another kingdom? Beuys did not enter the coyotes' habitat but brought the coyote into an art gallery. The art gallery became a makeshift zoo where one could view both an artist and an animal. The Coyote was forced to co-exist with Beuys. Maybe it was the kingdom of art that people had forgotten about? During the three days they spent together the coyote took Beuys's felt blanket as its space and Beuys used the shredded Wall Street Journal, which had been prepared for the coyote. An exchange took place and once inside the gallery the man and the animal set out the terms of their co-existence but the original terms were Beuys'.

Beuys titled the coyote piece *I like America and America Likes Me*. It was an ironic title as during the tour Beuys had made of America the year before he found much of America did not like him. The postscript of the book of hunters

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<sup>3</sup> In a later commentary on the piece Beuys remarked about performing it in Europe "If I did it here with a bear it would be quite different I could do it here with a bear." (Beuys 144) I didn't read this until after having done the bear works but I found it interesting as I had considered that the Bear had been erased from many parts of England.



and bears that is part of *In the Day the Bear Sleeps In the Night the Bear Dreams* reads, "I like England and England likes me." It plays on that same irony and the discomfort I had experienced since moving to England. In the South West of England I was confused by the rules of communication and the use of a language I had thought I knew well. In England I was able to become much more aware of myself as an American. In seeing myself as something other I saw more of myself. I often felt as awkward as a person in a bear suit. The dissonance between I like England and England likes me creates an untruth that points to a more uncomfortable truth.

By being both the bear and the human myself I was not seeking any kind of communion with the animal kingdom - I was interested in the impossibility of that task. This failed coexistence was both humorous and traumatic.

Within play...the impossibility of understanding is comic rather than tragic.

(Phelan, 1996: 165)

In presenting myself as something other I was able to represent the self as something that could be viewed from outside but I was not able to get any closer to a bear or a bird. In the playfulness of re/presentation one is able to laugh at the human plight of the difficulty of self-representation.

To deny the reality or logical significance of what we can never describe or understand is the crudest form of cognitive dissonance.

(Nagel: 1973)

To not be able to experience another being's experience is not to say that the experience does not exist. If there is only the possibility of subjective experience we as humans must find some way of accepting and representing this unknown difference, of picturing an idea of universal, which is inclusive without conveying a sameness that denies a variety of experience.





A respect for difference may depend on a certain fear of it; not on the inhumane and illusory elimination of it.

(Baker, 2000: 161)

The presentation and performance of the self as something other, something that it cannot be, points towards this predicament and asks how experience is understood.

### Mirrors and Reflections

The house I grew up in had a dressing area with L shaped closets with mirrored doors. Standing in a particular position, diagonal to both mirrors, would create an endless line of repetitions of my own reflection. Each image would sit inside the other getting smaller and smaller but never ending. At about the age of eight my best friend and I played a game in which we would place ourselves where we could see these endless copies of our image and perform simple actions such as an arm raise or a leg kick. Each time we did so we would yell in an annoyed voice "don't copy me," or "stop copying me," not to each other, but to our many reflections. It was infinitely entertaining to imagine these reflections of our selves, these "copies" to be real. We wanted to free them from our own bodies, so that our actions were not tied to theirs.

The intimate intertwining of that which 'is' and its representations thus also makes it impossible to understand the body and its movements in space as independent of the conditions of its representation.

(Zimmerman, 2001: 99)

When one looks at oneself in the mirror one sees oneself being looked at and looking at the same time. When one looks at a video monitor or a projection the impression is that this experience of looking is one sided and that no one or thing is looking back.<sup>4</sup> When a live presence is combined with a recorded image

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<sup>4</sup> Laura Mulvey's seminal article 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' posits the viewer's gaze as the active male gaze and problematically the female viewing experience as a transgendered one. There has been much debate since then about the



the question of what presence is and who is looking at who becomes more complex.

As the mediatized replaces the live within cultural economy, the live itself incorporates the mediatized, both technologically and epistemologically. The result of this implosion is that a seemingly secure opposition is now a site of anxiety . . .

(Auslander, 1999: 39)

Live and recorded is not a simple binary but rather a dialogue about representation, especially when the live image is the same as the recorded one. The live and the recorded create a loop; the live says once the recorded was live and the recorded says soon the live will just be a memory.

Both *Birdwatching* and *In the Day the Bear Sleeps In the Night the Bear Dreams* attempt to exist in this space, to participate in this conversation.

In each installation and performance the live element is masked and the viewer has the possibility of making the realisation that there is a live element in the scene. Once a live presence is discovered the recorded image is changed and a relationship is redrawn between the viewer and representation. When no live element is sensed the viewer understands herself as solely the viewer and not the viewed. She is looking around the space, watching the video images, as a part of an audience who are all viewing. When that relationship is altered, when a bear being or a bird/woman can look back, the viewer is in a flow of visual relationships.

In aesthetic staging the body should not be equated with 'life' nor does performance offer access to the 'genuine' body.

(Zimmerman, 2001: 98)

The live presence, especially a costumed one, is not a 'real' presence but another representation. If there is no genuine body which image is the original?

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idea of the female gaze. I have chosen not to specify the gender of the viewer in my consideration of the works.



Is the viewer the genuine body? With the ability to be viewed the viewer becomes involved in the exhibition space in a different manner, becoming a presence that is part of the installation rather than a removed audience member.

"it is the viewers who make the paintings" Duchamp once said, an incomprehensible remark unless we connect it to his keen sense of an emerging culture of use, in which meaning is born of collaboration and negotiation between the artist and the one who comes to view the work.  
(Bourriaud, 2002: 14)

A white organic-looking structure sits in the middle of a snow blown gallery space. Video is projected on two different walls. The larger projection shows a bear like figure in different landscapes; forest; river; moorlands; hills. In between each landscape scenario a black and white sequence of the bear riding a bicycle in circles attached to a circus master's chain is played. The other video image shows a bear sleeping in the woods and in a second presentation of the installation/performance a bear and a hunter chasing each other around a tree. As the person walks around the space they discover that the structure is a cave with an opening large enough to enter. The cave is pitch black inside and peering in one can't make anything out unless the bear decides to flash its white claws.

*Hibernating inside the cave I hadn't imagined that I would have the experience of watching people look who didn't know they were being looked at. The cave was very dark but as I was in there all day long my eyes adjusted to the light and I could see well. People would stand at the entrance of the cave peering in and trying to decide if they would enter this space within a space. Unable to see clearly the idea of a bear became connected to my representation of a bear. People were unsure if they should cross the threshold of the space, of what they might become vulnerable to. Once having entered the cave people were still unaware that anything was in the space unless I moved or they came close enough to touch my furry body. Some people reacted with fear and*



immediately left, others stayed gaining comfort. The viewer became reliant on senses other than vision. They could not take in the scene but had to experience textures, smells, and sounds. I 'hibernated' throughout it all. If someone entered the cave and decided to stay the vulnerability shifted to me. I lay sleeping. Only once did I feel a viewer abused my vulnerability – holding my paw while telling a sexual story about teddy bear – in fact until that moment I don't think I had understood the balance of trust that I had asked for in the set up of the piece.

The video monitors or screen or projected image was another mask for the construction and deconstruction of person. Here there was also distance – even in the close up,

(Jonas, quoted in Zimmerman, 2001: 98)

The image on a monitor or a screen is one that can never quite be reached. No matter how close up the camera comes there is always a screen separating the viewer and the image. *Birdwatching* attempts to break down the wall between screen and viewer by conflating live transmission and live presence.

A cacophony of birdlike sounds fills the gallery space. One can hear the installation long before one can see it. Newspaper is spread over the ground and scattered with birdseed. Different size monitors are set on bird like perches or in one case in a birdhouse. Water bottles (feeders) are attached to the monitors, which are being fed a video signal.<sup>5</sup> Each bird is a different colour, blue, yellow, green, or red. Each one exists in an individual monitor. All but the red bird is a recorded set loop. Each shot is exactly the same and one cannot discern the live image from the recorded image. The audience is also being recorded and the live image is being transmitted to the room where I am performing live as the redbird. I can 'see' through my monitor. As people converge in the space, looking at the monitors, the red bird slowly begins to mimic their live conversation. As people realise the redbird is live and can

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<sup>5</sup> The term for a live transmission of video signal is live feed.





communicate they begin to make comments to be mimicked. Some people pick up birdseed and throw it or hold it up to the red bird's screen. The red bird pecks at the seed 'through' the monitor. This scene repeats itself in a variety of ways as people leave and come into the installation. This interaction itself is recorded and transmitted in real time to the "live" version of the bird/woman. Who is the audience of whom? Everything that is "live" is also "recorded".

By reasserting the unbridgeable distinction between audience and performance, live performance foregrounds its own fractious nature and the unlikelihood of community in a way that mediatized representations, which never hold out the promise of unity, do not.

(Auslander, 1999: 57)

*I am live, alone in a room, watching people watch me. I watch people respond to my mediated image. The image is displaying a different experience than the one I am having. The image, which is the red bird, interacts with its viewers, has contact. I experience a sense of aloneness and disconnection. People treat the image as an animal. They say stupid things to it and try and feed it birdseed. In the room next door I feel uncomfortable with this treatment, but I am separated from the image, and continue the performance. It is my transmitted image that offers any connection rather than my live presence, which is shut away in a room close by.*

I was interested in the discrepancies between the performed activity and the constant duplicating, changing, and altering of information in the video . . . Here were parallel worlds. I could inhabit, simultaneously, different fields of view, different channels.

(Jonas, 2001: 108)

The screen or monitor is a frame to look through. The frame defines what is inside and what is outside. *The White Bear and Other Unwanted Thoughts* offers different apertures and ways of viewing. It is installed in a public space, in a window on "Main Street", but some elements feel private and some more happily public. The front windows offer two cave like spaces. In one a video



image of a white bear is shown sleeping in the other a brown bear. They are shot on black backgrounds and it is impossible to tell where the monitor begins and ends. The bears float in the cave space. They never open their eyes, never look up and stay constantly asleep. The next windows offer small peek holes. It is a more private experience, evoking an erotic space. Here looking into small monitors the viewer sees the private dreams of the bears. There is no narrative drive and one can look and look away at any time. At one point the bears peek back. At another the white bear slowly pulls its insides out. The next set of monitors is pressed flat against the glass of the window. The edge of the frame is clearly delineated. The monitors are across from each other and each reflects its image into the glass across. The sound, which is heard as part of the installation, is linked to the landscapes in these monitors. The images switch from the scenes of desert roads, woodlands, industrial areas to video space where the bears frolic on coloured screens. The viewers must move around the space positioning themselves in different ways to view the different fragments. A viewer can sometimes block the image from anyone else – as when he covers a peek hole to look inside. There is no singular position to see from.

### Taxidermy of the Other or How to Make a Friend

A botched taxidermy piece might be defined as referring to the human and to the animal, without itself being either human or animal and without it being a direct representation of either.

(Baker, 2000: 75)

Is the white bear real? Can a bear imagine something? While the recorded images of the white and brown bears play continuously in CEPA Gallery's windows on Main Street of Buffalo, NY the skin of the white bear lies on the floor of the basement gallery. Its human face is projected into the skin<sup>6</sup>. It lays there an empty shell, a rug with eyes that occasionally open. These eyes give

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<sup>6</sup> In a knowing homage to Tony Oursler, we used the same small Sony projector that he used for his doll figures with projected faces.



the appearance of looking but they cannot see. A large pile of stuffing sits like a mountain of fluff nearby. Here is an empty skin. Here is fullness.

*In my Brown Bear suit I walk on the street towards the gallery. The streetlights feel bright. I, the Brown Bear, walk slowly, awkwardly. It is a mournful walk of being not one thing or another. In the gallery someone shouts, "The white bear is downstairs." He has taken on the story. He assumes the brown bear is looking for something. Why does he send it to the empty skin rather than full-bodied image of the video installation? The brown bear makes its way through the people in the gallery. Is the brown bear one of the art objects? People follow the brown bear in to the room where the white bearskin lies. They keep a distance, staying at the doorway, creating a stage. The brown bear feels the flatness of the white bear. Its empty suit speaks of an unfulfilled presence. The brown bear knows what action to take. The brown bear walks to the pile of filler and begins to stuff the white bear, to give it shape again. This repetitive action is not acting but rather a task. The brown bear knows what to do. I, the brown bear, find it strange to be watched. I notice a sensation of empathy, as if it is a funeral rite. My paws are too large and undexterous to finish the task. I look to the people watching me. A person in a brown bear suit does not speak. A brown bear communicates with its eyes. Two people begin to help me finish the stuffing. It is a moment of communion. The white bear is full. The white bear is dead. The brown bear mimics the white bear's position and lies down on the ground, feet against the white bear. Two stuffed bears, one with real eyes that look back. A man walks by looking down at the white bear, then at the brown bear. He jumps with fright when the brown bear looks back.*

### **Another Childhood Memory**

I had a white stuffed dog, one of those, which stood on two feet rather than in a four legged dog position. I put a variety of food colouring all over its stomach and kept it in my closet because it was ill. Occasionally I would show a friend



my sick stuffed animal.

### Copies, Doubles and Originals

The parodic repetition of 'the original' . . . reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the natural and original.

(Butler, 1999: 41)

Does the evocation of an animal suggest an original? Does a blue bird/woman bring to mind a blue bird? Or is it something else, something other? If the beings conveyed in *Birdwatching* or *The Bear Projects* are not imitations (neither bear nor bird nor woman) perhaps there is no fixed point to which they refer.

If we imagine the position of a fascinated Self, it was because the multiplicity towards which it leans, stretching to the breaking point, is the continuation of another multiplicity that works it and strains it from the inside. In fact the Self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 249)

The Brown Bear and the White Bear both oppose and complement each other. The White Bear is a version of the Brown Bear while at the same time it is unclear if the White Bear is anything but a phantom image of the Brown Bear. An unwanted thought that stalks the Brown Bear's terrain. The Bears are a singularity, a white bear and a brown bear, while being each other's double. They are a reflection of each other, a negative and positive, where two makes both two and one. We based the white bear not on a polar bear, but the Kermode bears of British Columbia. The Kermode, known as the spirit bear, is a black bear, which because of a recessive gene has a white coat.

For it is doubling that elicits the notion that to an original has been added its copy. The double is the simulacrum, the second, the representative of the original . . .

(Krauss, Rosalind quoted in Phelan, 1996: 49)





The Brown and White Bears, both in states of being, create a loop of meaning between themselves. The presence of one both validates and questions the other. The white bear is both the same as the brown bear and its opposite. It is its negative, negation, and positive, affirmation. To see them as the same denies their difference, to not recognise their sameness is not to see.

But in being seen in conjunction with the original, the double destroys the pure singularity of the first. Through duplication, it opens the original to the effect of difference, of deferral, of one-thing-after-another, or with in another: of multiples burgeoning within the same.

(Krauss, Rosalind quoted in Phelan, 1996: 49)

We are always in a state of becoming, holding one moment as we reach for the next. We are constantly shedding skin, involved in unnoticeable change. A moving image is a series of still images. One image takes the place of the next and we perceive motion.

In the act of repetition nothing stays the same. I clap my hands ten times in a row. Each clap is somehow slightly different. A moment can never truly be frozen into a single image – there are multitudes of ways to frame any given instant.

In *Birdwatching* the live image is a copy of the recorded images. The recorded images are video loops. They repeat over and over with no definite end or beginning. There is no clear duration. One can enter and leave the space of the video loops without any conscious recognition of teleology. Editing can change the experience of time. An event can be sped up, slowed down, fragmented, or repeated. A video, which repeats, but has a specific duration, is different than a loop. If there is a clear start and end point a viewer can consider it a cue, a measurement of her experience. A live presence can be in juxtaposition, a constant presence.



The durational performance is a genre of Performance Art. Depending on the rules the artists decides upon s/he sets a fixed amount of time or continues until s/he is finished. It could be a number of hours or even one year<sup>7</sup>. If an audience is present they are rarely expected to stay through out the whole event but to dip in and out at will. The durational piece does not usually set out to entertain in any traditional sense, although it might set out to bore. Time is not encapsulated but played out in everyday terms. I wanted to explore a long durational performance in *In the day the Bear Sleeps, In the night the Bear Dreams* but wondered what I would do throughout the day. I realised I needn't do anything and that being present in the installation was performing.

*As I, the brown bear, lay sleeping consciously, in a cave, in a gallery the repetition of the video playing became my clock. The video was eleven minutes long with one and a half minutes of white in between. I stayed in the gallery for seven hours each day. Five repetitions of the video equalled a little more than an hour. Sometimes I lost track, floating in and out. I would like to hibernate as a bear, to have no need for food nor drink or expulsion of bodily waste for the winter months. To be free to sleep half a life time away, to be outside of capitalism's clock. But even here I go by the clock, hibernating to the gallery's opening and closing hours. It's a job.*

Sleep is involved in all three of the installations. Sleep as escape, Sleep as rejuvenation. Sleep as an endless loop. Sleep as a layer of presence. A person who lives a normal life span will spend five years of her life in dreamtime.<sup>8</sup>

Sleep is an active space. In *Birdwatching* each of the birds has moments when it puts its head down on its chest feigning sleep. I had decided to do this so that if I got tired during the performance or did not want to engage with the audience I could sleep instead. In *In the Day the Bear Sleeps, In the Night the Bear Dreams* the bear, the live being, sleeps within its own video dreams. In *The White Bear*

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<sup>7</sup> Teching Hsieh did a series of one-year performances between 1978-1999. See <http://www.one-year-performance.com/> for more information.

<sup>8</sup> <http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/sleep.html>



and other *Unwanted Thoughts* the hibernating bears frame the installation. Their sleeping is presented as an endless loop – no beginning, no end. In sleep the eyes are inverted, looking inward into an interior world.

### Getting Under the Skin

The body in and of itself –the-body-without-disguise- becomes a vacant unmarked canvas. The attempt to see and paint the body, to make it visible requires that the artist add a prop to the stage.

(Phelan, 1996: 68)

The bird/women in *Birdwatching* have no feathers. Their skin is exposed and masked at the same time. The bird is naked. The colours of the birds' (skin) and their varied behaviours differentiate them yet they are each a copy of the other.

*I had two brown bear suits made of two different designs. One somewhat tailored with pockets, the other the style of a sleeper suit and a different type of fur. I imagined a scene in which the bear would slip out of its fur only to reveal another layer of fur underneath. This would repeat continuously – never getting to the skin.*

The tailored bear suit, in homage to Joseph Beuys, hangs on a hook next to a small book. The fur suit is the layer above the skin, the exterior, the outer costume. Hanging neatly on a gallery wall it says the bear is not at work, the bear is dead; the bear is a costume that is not being worn. But inside the gallery space, inside the cave, the bear being is present, covered in another bear suit.

*During the second performance in Belfast a young woman was determined to enter the cave and hug the bear. I reacted badly to this idea and continually scared her off by making sudden movements. I became more and more enthralled with my ability to do so. Although I could not know what it is to be a bear I had no desire to know what it is to be a teddy bear. Eventually she went*

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off, but returned soon after wearing the bear suit that was hanging as part of the installation. Somehow she felt that this would give us a connection, that we would be two bears, and that she could cross the threshold of viewer/performer to performer. I was both delighted and horrified. I felt amazed that someone had gotten so involved in the artifice that they would put on the bear suit that was placed as object, yet I also felt unwilling to accept her as performer. I had set up a situation, which asked people to recognise and decide whether to cross a threshold, but I wanted to be the only Bear. I continued with the wild act and did not let her in the cave.

The bearskin hanging in the installation does not only refer to Beuys' suit but the quintessential hunting photo of the hunter with his bearskin. The small book which framed the installation of *In the Day the Bear Sleeps In the Night the Bear Dreams* used some of these images along with Vito Acconci in *Seed Bed*, Joseph Beuys in *Coyote*, and Chris Burden in *Shoot*. The photos are accompanied by quotes from turn of the century bear hunting stories. The reader/viewer comes to the bear through the hunter, through the chase. One realises the bear is surrounded by men.

Even in his early years of bear hunting, he often went out of his way to simply watch a bear and not shoot it. He was the finest type of hunter, the type that nonhunters and antihunters have trouble understanding; he loved the bears he hunted.

(Schullery, 1988: 162)

Female bears are apparently the toughest opponents. They will defend their cubs to the most vicious end. In the tales of bear hunting killing is sometimes a form of loving. Bears are interesting to hunt as they make such a worthy foe. A hunt would often go on for days.

The bear in the installation is gendered through the images and text in this book. The three pieces pictured by Acconci, Beuys, and Burden all influenced the





installation. In all three of the works there is a complex relation to their "male" role as artists that affects their interaction with the audience and in Beuys case the coyote. In *Shoot* Chris Burden sets himself up as the target yet rather than victim he is the author of the situation and perhaps the audience are the victims. The fact that he was actually shot was an accident but the image of him walking off from the performance with a bullet wound has been the singular image, which has represented this work. In *Seed Bed* Acconci lay underneath a ramp fantasizing and masturbating for three days a week for eight hours a day during one month. He interacted with the audience, who could not see him but could hear him through speakers, speaking sexual fantasies about them as they walked above him. He was present in his absence in that his body was there but only available through his voice. Any viewer who chose to enter the gallery became part of his sexual fantasy. In the *Coyote* piece Beuys sets himself up as a shamanistic figure seeking a relationship with the Coyote. It is man and animal marking their territory. I wanted to enter the trajectory of these works, and played with ideas I found in all three, but I also wanted to acknowledge a wall of masculinity that I could not cross. Instead of bringing an animal into the work I was both the animal and the artist. I created a situation where the audience became part of the work but I found that I was also in a vulnerable situation.

Stallion and mare, ram and sheep, bull and cow, chicken and rooster, dog and bitch - all domesticated animals with names that denote their sex. A bear is a bear is a bear. There is no differentiation in names for a female or a male bear; perhaps because humans do not control their breeding. When we see a bear without a trained eye, we do not see a particular sex, rather we see an animal. In my bear suit my femininity is erased. The shape of my body is unclear and one cannot tell if I am female.

When the bird or bear beings in these installation/performances look at a viewer what does the viewed feel? Is it an animal gaze that they are viewed by? A female gaze? A mediated gaze? Can one feel a gaze through the screen of a



monitor or in the darkness of a fabricated cave?

Animals are always the observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance.

(Berger, 1992: 16)

I did not shoot any close ups for *In the Day* and I do not think the gender of the performer is obvious in the images. The gender is inscribed by the context the book creates as well as my name listed as the artist. In *The White Bear* we used close ups, and our faces, covered in make up are obvious. I am not sure if the images are gendered or, again, if our names as the performers gender those bears. Several times when we were shooting the video passers-by referred to me as he. Unlike the Bear from *In the Day* these bears are never hunted. Instead they are viewed. At one point the viewer might even catch a glimpse of the white bear pulling its insides out; a self-harming bear, or Artaud writing from his belly<sup>9</sup>. In *Bird Watching* there is no question of gender; the birds are female. The nakedness of the woman performer presented as animal, bird, makes an uncomfortable juxtaposition.

One is ones' own gender to the extent that one is not the other gender. A formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair.

(Butler, 1999: 30)

But when the pair is not a clear binary does it open up the identity field? What happens to a binary when a singular is presented as a multiple? I am a woman because I am not a bird. I am not a bird because I am still a woman. I am not a woman because I am becoming bird? I am a brown bear because I am not a white bear. I am a white bear because there is a brown bear. I am not a bear because I am a human. I am not a woman because I am a bear. I am not any one thing because I am becoming.

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<sup>9</sup> "I only want to write when I have nothing more to ponder -Like someone who would eat his belly, the winds of his belly from inside," (Artaud, 1995: 84)



## Mimicry and Silence

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it...

(Irigaray, 1985: 25)

The blue bird squawks, the yellow bird says hooo hooo, the green bird caws, and the red bird speaks. Nothing originates from the red bird; it only mimics its audience. The red bird repeats what she hears in her red bird voice. Through this mimicry people began to understand themselves as participants in the installation. They understood the red bird could hear through the cage/monitor. People delighted in hearing their phrases repeated. Their language was altered, made into bird speech, made slightly grotesque.

Hysteria is silent and at the same time it mimes. And - how could it be otherwise - miming/reproducing a language that is not its own, masculine language, it caricatures and deforms the language.

(Irigaray, 1985: 76)

The Bears are silent. They don't enter into human speech or animal sounds. They only watch and listen in a mournful silence. They are not anthropomorphic bears, and they, not being bears, have no access to an animal communication.

Language is a condition of both bodily seduction and the threat of injury.

(Butler, 1999: XV)

The bears seduce and threaten at once. Amusing and strange they ask to be watched; yet they also represent the threat of a bear, the threat of an animal. In the day a common reaction to the discovery that a being was in the cave was to physically start or even scream. During the performance of *The White Bear* the stuffed white bear could be looked at safely; the live brown bear was uncomfortable. The bears' silence emphasizes their between-ness, their not-this-nor-that-ness.



## Video Space Real Space

The birds are enclosed within the monitor. It becomes a cage with the glass of the monitor containing the bird figure. The monitor is part of the image making the video space a three dimensional space. The size of the monitor determines the size of the bird. The image sits precisely inside the monitor never accessing the off-screen space. The bird fits in the box.

A real bear/person sleeps in a plaster cave covered in fake snow while a video projection imagines a videoed bear person wandering diverse landscapes. The outdoors becomes a set for the bear figure. Each landscape is defined by the bear figure as part of a narrative while at the same time setting the scene. But nothing happens; the bear just wanders. The figure in the cave, live and touchable, makes the video dreams more real. Here where I can touch it is that bear figure which here I see wandering the forest. Sets become real and the real become sets.

The White Bear and the Brown Bear also appear in landscapes but they do not so much wander them as become a presence. The brown bear is placed in the many scenes – desert, forest, industrial, and the white bear appears and disappears.

a bluescreen used for video superimposition, manifesting at once the characters' unreality and their potential for displacement onto various backgrounds and into endless scenarios.

(Bourriaud, 2002: 58)

The Bears also play within a video space that is interspersed between the landscapes. By shooting with a blue screen we were able to place the bears onto to new backgrounds. We set them on black or cream video mattes – strange non-spaces, which emphasised the artifice of the bears.





The bears and the birds exist in conversational gaps. They are in-between seeing and being seen, between being and performing, between one thing and the other. In a state of becoming they are always a question.



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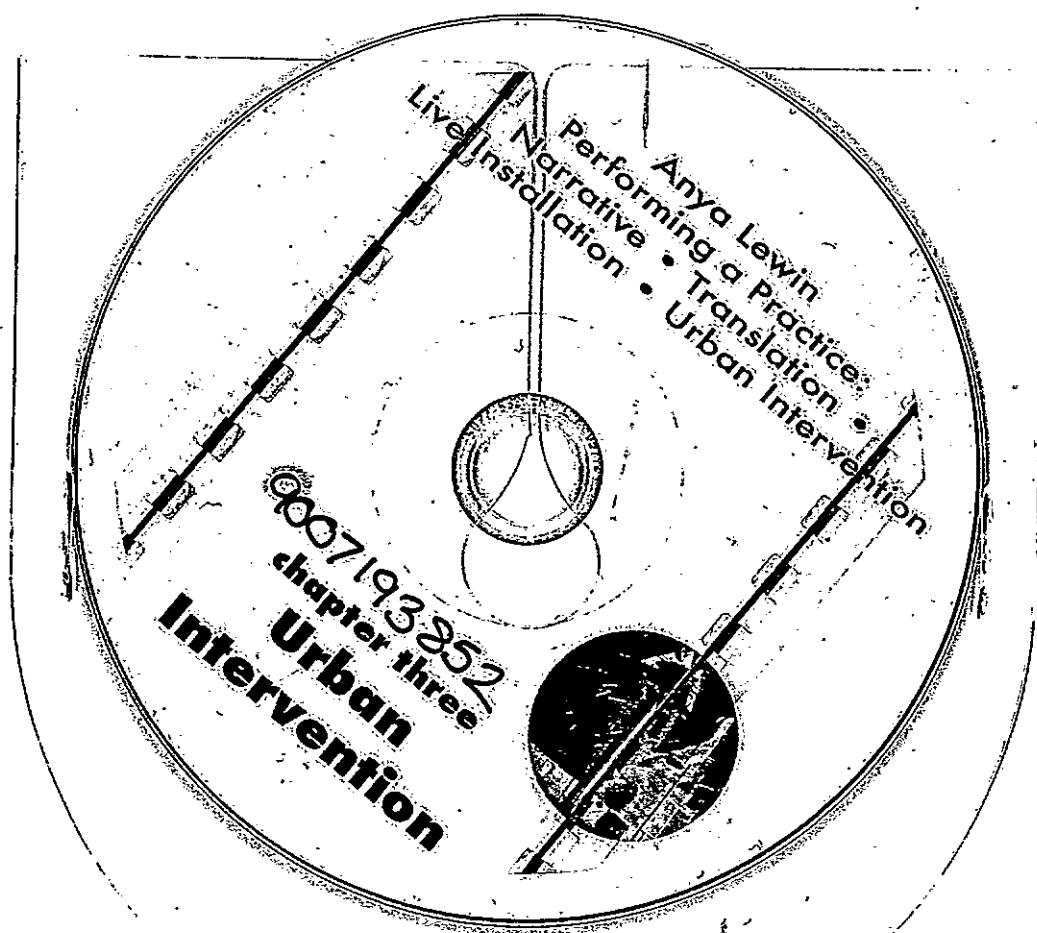
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## Chapter 3: Urban Intervention

### Who's Looking?

This condition of reception, in which meaning is made a function of the work's relationship to its site of exhibition, came to be known as site specificity, whose radicalism thus lay not only in the displacement of the artist-subject by the spectator-subject but in securing that displacement through the wedding of art work to a particular environment.

(Crimp, 1995: 17)

Often the contemporary art gallery is presented as a blank space without any ideological overtones – the art holds the meaning not the “condition of reception”. The gallery space, or white box as it is sometimes referred to, does offer an opportunity to create a world or experience which is focussed and directed by the work itself, and can be an exciting space to operate in specifically because of its clear intention of housing art, but it is not devoid of context. A viewer can read the gallery or museum space in a myriad of manners – accepting of its authority, resentful, curious, comfortable etc. When a person enters a gallery or a museum he or she knows he or she is going to look at Art with a capital “A.” The viewer is entering into a physical space that houses a complex ideological system, which categorises and legitimises the art that is being displayed. A museum historicises or canonises an artist, a successful commercial gallery places the artist as an economically viable commodity, a small upstart gallery places the artist in a particular scene. Of course this is a simplistic summary and each of these categories bleeds into the others, as well as there being other versions of the gallery or museum. But each exhibition



space comes with its own context which the viewer either knowingly reads or not. In the next chapter I will look at these ideas more closely by using both my own experience of running a gallery as well as being commissioned to create work for other artist run spaces, to examine the ideology of the gallery through considering it as an artist project in itself.

The focus of this chapter is upon what happens when art is placed outside of the context of the gallery. If most people who come into a gallery or museum enter with the intention of viewing art one can assume those who have no interest in art or are uncomfortable with their ability to understand or experience it tend to stay away, and spaces of art are often accused of being elitist and catering to a small audience of art patrons. Museums and galleries with public funding operate under pressure to expand the audience for art, to educate future viewers, and to find ways to bring more of the public in. One method of broadening audience has been to place art in untraditional spaces so that a non-intentional audience can encounter the work. It is also often a strategy used when the Gallery itself is under refurbishment. The work is still linked to the institution and so it is hoped will refer audiences back to the actual gallery space at other times. Jane Rendell, in her essay 'Space, Place and Site in Critical Spatial Arts Practice' writes:

Despite being located outside the physical confines of the gallery, the visible invigilation operates to maintain the institutional boundary of the gallery and position the work as art. Such works are commissioned as part of off-site programmes, usually the domain of a different team of curators from those that curate the internal spaces of the gallery. These artworks are usually expected to be accessible to a general public and



aligned with the needs of the educational programme, their functionality, or directed social use, often resulting in a lower status for the work.

(Rendell)

Rendell's point that this work is sometimes not valued in the same terms as gallery work is interesting and elucidates some of the tension that currently exists in the British art world working under the Blair government's mandate of social inclusion. Perhaps the out-of-gallery work is less valued because it is wedded to a particular site and so does not carry the modernist notion of universal meaning as well as being available to a non-art audience. Nicolas Bourriaud importantly points out that this viewing audience is not necessarily better or more valuable but merely different.

The issue is not to contrast the gallery (a locus of "separate art," and therefore bad) with a public place imagined as ideal, where the "noble gaze" of the passerby is naively fetishized the way the "noble savage" once was. A club, a school, or a street are not "better places" but simply other places.

(Bourriaud, 2002: 65)

When art is placed outside the walls of the galleries and museums there is the opportunity for the accidental audience. But this is not necessarily a form of inclusion and could even be viewed as an intrusion. The idea of intrusion is not a negative one to my mind, and certainly more interesting than many of the neo liberal versions of inclusion. Intrusion can offer a critical space to reflect on the constant exposure to advertising, which most city dwellers live with, as well as an interruption to daily routine.



Guy Debord in *Theory of the Derive* writes about a young student in Paris, who during the course of a month never varies her route out of the triangular pattern of work, school, and home. Should one know a city beyond the necessary paths one must take? Debord suggests a derive, a drift, where:

one or more persons during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their other usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the encounters they find there. (Debord, 1958)

Is this what one can give the accidental audience in placing art outside the closed rooms of the gallery and museum? Does an unexpected meeting with a building suddenly intertwined with a projection, an advertising board that doesn't seem to be advertising anything, offer an alteration of everyday experience, a chance to drift through the day, for at least a moment, in a unfamiliar manner? When art is encountered in these open spaces will it necessarily be recognised as art, or will it even be truly seen? Is this a question of inside and outside? How does a person look at the things she encounters during the regular routine of her day? Is it possible to measure this and can an artist creating a work for the city intervene into her experience? What kind of responsibility does an artist hold in this engagement?

I will explore these questions, while making no claims to reaching answers, through three projects that I was involved in which took place outside of the gallery. These ruminations are offered in hindsight, as I was not always aware of these issues and ideas while the projects were in process.





## Riding the Bus

*Jumbo's Thick Skin* 1999

CEPA Gallery (Buffalo, NY) commissioned this project for a large group show entitled *Ruins in Reverse*. The commission was for 20 digital prints to be placed in a public transit bus, in Buffalo, NY, which would take a different route every day for the three months the prints were installed. The prints were placed where advertisements were usually located. Previous to their installation on the bus the prints were displayed in CEPA gallery for six weeks. They were contextualised with a placard, which explained they were made as a "Bus Show"

We need to work toward flooding the market – even if for the moment merely the intellectual market-with a mass of desires whose realisation is not beyond the capacity of man's present means of action on the material world, but only beyond the capacity of the old social organisation.  
(Debord, 1955)

If the purpose of advertising is to create new desires in the consumer can 'art' placed in the same space work towards similar ends with different effects? Can we look back to Debord and "flood the market" with the desire to critique or question rather than purchase?

Since its inception in 1976, the CEPA Metro Bus Show has served as a unique exhibition space for both emerging and established regional and national artists. The longest running show of its kind, the Metro Bus Show reaches new and diverse audiences in the Western New York community. After a "preview" exhibit at CEPA Gallery, the exhibition is mounted onto the advertising space of NFTA Metro Buses, and travels different routes in the Buffalo Metropolitan area for six to twelve weeks.

(CEPA Web Site)



The CEPA metro Bus Show was my first public commission. This project was a new experience for me because the form and placement of the work was decided before I had even begun. There would be 20 digital prints of a particular size and they would be shown in a gallery and in a bus, displayed where advertisements were usually placed. They also had to consider the theme "Ruins in Reverse" the title of the show in which they were included. The context of the bus was the most important as even in the gallery it would be displayed as a "bus show".

I found it quite difficult to begin. It was the idea of a certain, although accidental audience, that was sure to encounter the piece that made me unsure of what the work should be. Previously I had created work without an idea of where it would be displayed and disseminated; now the people on the bus in Buffalo, NY were going to encounter the work. I wasn't sure what that meant and what role my consideration of an audience should take in the process. Reflecting back on the project I realise that I imagined an audience who hadn't chosen to attend an art exhibition to be somehow more important than an art audience, or at least a more particular target. By the end of the project I had somewhat revised my views which I will expand on later.

The prints would replace the usual adverts that fill the space of public transportation. Advertising's role is to infiltrate the consumer's mind with a perceived need. I tried to imagine what need an artist would fill. The bus would



provide me with an audience so what should I provide for them?

I began by thinking about a bus and its windows. About sitting in a moving vehicle and looking out as images pass by. Passengers create their own films. How does one place oneself in relation to a city as one moves (or are moved) through it? What landmarks stand out to the passenger through personal memories and a city's own construction of its monuments? Michel de Certeau writes:

To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper.

(De Certeau, 1984: 103)

Perhaps one could substitute to ride a bus for to walk. To ride a bus is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper. I suppose a bus is a sort of proper. It encloses you rather than the way walking in a city exposes you to all the elements, but still to ride a bus through a city seems to me to have a similar lack of place. I began with the idea of the window, of fragments of a city passing by. The prints were to be directly above the window, and were the same rectangular shape. I decided to find Buffalo as a place by researching its history. I spent time at the Buffalo Historical Society sifting through its image archive and from there decided to concentrate on a narrative of 100 years of Buffalo's history starting with the Pan American exhibition in 1901. The panels would provide the riders of a bus with a history of Buffalo's disasters. As the bus passed a particular building or space the passenger might see that same building reconfigured in one of the panels. The series would offer



an idea of a place while being experienced in a space of transition.

Buffalo as a city is a history of poor decisions. In the 1900's it had its hey day climbing happily into a key zone of industrial production through the 1950's until it began to experience an economic crash that continues today. I relied heavily on two books to guide me in my research: *High Hopes: The Rise and Decline of Buffalo, New York* by Mark Goldman and *Blood and Volts*, a history of the electric chair by T.H. Metzger. I collected images from the 1901 Pan American exhibition; of the grain elevators, which had once been a source of prime income for Buffalo but since the creation of the St. Lawrence seaway were architectural ghosts; of the destroyed Frank Lloyd Wright building, of the abandoned train station. I used a myriad of sources. Images scanned from postcards, downloaded from the web, stills from the films Edison had shot of the 1901 Pan American exhibition also available on the web, images scanned from books, stills taken from Hollywood films. I stole shamelessly. A history is written and rewritten by an arrangement and rearrangement of fragments. I realised that digital manipulation programmes, and the ease of the digital grab would allow me to remix the history of Buffalo. As I read the stories of electrical power, presidential assassinations, buildings left to entropy, monuments unexplainably destroyed with no trace, and most fascinating of all an elephant whose hide was so thick he survived attempted electrocution, I began to recognise all the elements of a blockbuster disaster film. Yet Hollywood has always stayed away from Buffalo, NY preferring the monuments of Manhattan. I decided to remedy





this and began to insert images from *King Kong*, *Towering Inferno*, and *Independence Day* into Buffalo's history. As I began to put the panels together, each one reflecting part of a lost Buffalo I realised I needed some punctuation in the narrative I was tracing. I used the population figures of Buffalo from 1900 to 2000. They made a perfect arc with the 2000 census being slightly lower than 1900 and the 1950s seeing the highest population. Four panels within the series of twenty slowly unveiled this information. I used Jumbo the elephant (coloured pink) all the way through the images as well. The elephant that had avoided electrocution during the Pan American Exhibition only two days after Leon Czolgosz, a follower of Emma Goldman, was put to death in the electric chair. He seemed a symbol for Buffalo, somehow still surviving disaster after disaster.

The first panel of the series used only text and read as follows:

1896 - First transmission of electricity from Niagara Falls to Buffalo -  
1901: MAY - The Pan American Exhibition opens in Buffalo - SEPTEMBER  
- President McKinley visits and is assassinated by anarchist and Emma  
Goldman admirer Leon Czolgosz - Czolgosz is sentenced to death by  
electrocution - OCTOBER 29 He dies in the electric chair - NOVEMBER 1 -  
Jumbo the Elephant, an exhibition favourite, attacks his trainer, Frank C.  
Bostock, who decides to eliminate Jumbo by electrocution - NOVEMBER 3  
- A crowd of 7,000 gathers to view the execution - 11,000 volts of  
electricity are shot into Jumbo - His thick hide is impossible to penetrate -  
Jumbo lives - 1904 - Lackawanna Steel Co. opens - 1920's - Buffalo  
becomes the center of the grain industry - 1923 - The first King Kong film  
is released - 1929: JUNE - Buffalo's fourteen million dollar Central  
Terminal is opened - OCTOBER - The stock market crashes - 1950 - The  
Frank Lloyd Wright Larkin building is demolished for untraceable reasons  
- 1959 - The St. Lawrence Seaway is built ending Buffalo's prominence in  
the grain trade - 1963 - SUNY at Buffalo builds its second campus in  
suburban Amherst rather than on Buffalo's waterfront - 1966 - Concrete  
Central, the largest of Buffalo's grain elevators, is closed down - 1976 The  
remake of King Kong is released - 1979 - Central Terminal is closed -  
1982 - Lackawanna Steel is closed down - 1999 - Buffalo prepares to



become the biotech center -

The rest of the panels illustrated these events through the collaged images. There was a particular order that I installed them in the bus but I realised that depending on where a passenger sat she would take them in her own order.

Once the prints had been installed on the bus I excitedly made arrangements to ride it on one of its routes across Buffalo. Sitting on the bus I watched several people get on at different stops. Once on the bus very few people looked up. They read, listened to music wearing headphones, stared out the window or at their feet, but they seemed to have little interest in their environment, and no one examined the prints. Thoroughly depressed I quickly got off the bus.

In contrast to the 'white cube' gallery's signification of emptiness the urban landscape offers a profusion and a complexity of signs and spaces where the 'condition of reception' Crimp first identifies with site-specificity might be countered by an excess of information.

(Kaye, 2000: 33)

When the prints were displayed in the gallery people examined them; that's what one does in a gallery environment. Perhaps no one looked while on the bus precisely because the prints were in the space of advertising. Had the bus riders created their own defence system against the 'excess of information'? They simply didn't look? Perhaps the most radical thing I could have done would have been to place blank prints in the bus, giving the passengers a break from visual and textual input.



De Certeau argues that one cannot control exactly how a consumer will consume; and it is in this actual practice that a revolutionary possibility of the everyday occurs. Arguing against the activity of reading as passive (and one can think of reading an image as well) he comments:

In reality, the activity of reading has on the contrary all the characteristics of a silent production: the drift across the page, the metamorphosis of the text effected by the wandering eyes of the reader, the improvisation and expectation of meanings inferred from a few words, leaps over written spaces in an ephemeral dance. But since he is incapable of stockpiling (unless he writes or records), the reader cannot protect himself against the erosion of time (while reading, he forgets himself and he forgets what he has read) unless he buys the object (book, image), which is no more than a substitute (the spoor or promise) of moments "lost" in reading. He insinuates into another person's text the ruses of pleasure and appropriation: he poaches on it, is transported into it, pluralizes himself in it like the internal rumblings of one's body.

(De Certeau, 1984: xxi)

This is a powerful description of a viewer's or reader's participation in the continuing life of a piece of work. In Duchampian terms the viewer makes the picture and I find this idea of an undefined exchange exciting and one that implies a need for the maker to be willing to give the work over to the audience. After riding the bus with my project I realised I could not control how or if it was looked at. I was left with the question of how one could offer alternative realities, or as Debord puts it desires, in an anti-authoritarian manner. It seemed a context could affect how a work of art was viewed but I wondered how a work of art could change something as powerfully imbued in the city dwellers' everyday experience as the space of advertising. Should the artwork take on the rules of advertising? If advertising has a clear idea to convey – to sell a



product or at least the ideal of consuming, what should artwork in the space of advertising do? In actuality art and advertising are not the same thing and don't work on the same rules, nor should they. Art needs to retain the right to be ambiguous, experiential, complex, without a clear goal if it wants to. I wonder if the world of advertising (made up of many trained in art school) has been more successful in taking from art than art has at using advertising? As commerce and creativity are encouraged to blend in what's now termed "the creative industries" this question will be more and more pertinent.

After riding the bus with my work I wrote an email to Robert Creeley about my disappointment. He replied:

Reflective judgement may argue authority – but at best it's always too late. And who knows but the next person on the bus had his/her life changed just by looking. And who knows how many it takes to see anything at all to make a difference. You don't work that street, like they say, so don't worry about it. Neither does the bus driver incidentally. He doesn't really know even who's sitting in back of him, much less what they see...

I had another friend here in Buffalo, then a young lawyer for the city, who one evening started quoting to me: "So much depends upon/ the red wheelbarrow/ glazed with rainwater/ beside the white chickens." I asked him how he happened to know that poem, and he answered, from riding the bus. It was on a placard, etc....

You make the art, think of the application – and the rest is what life proves to make of it. Onward!

(Creeley, 1999)

I took his advice and came to the conclusion that on this occasion I couldn't follow up whatever dialogue I might or might not have started. I made the work





and people could do with it what they liked. That was their prerogative.

## Public Projections

### *Huge and Mobile (HUMO) 2003*

This intensive experimental workshop will invite participants to develop and present urban interventions using a mobile platform for the projection of huge images. Basically, we will place the world's most powerful projector (which produces 60 x 60 metre images with over 100,000 ANSI lumen intensity) on the back of a pick-up truck together with a diesel generator, a GPS tracker, a pan/tilt platform and an assortment of lenses. The project will consist of rapid deployment of strategic images to transform urban landscapes. Logos, emblematic buildings, quotidian spaces, suburban malls, advertising billboards, etc., will be the targets of unannounced, unregulated ephemeral interventions. Documentation of these projects will be an integral part of the workshop, as the conditions of possibility of legal/political/aesthetic viability are fast, short interventions below the radar of potential regulators.

(Ars Electronica Web Site, 2003)

This call for participation, from artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer who conceived of and led the workshop with philosopher Brian Massumi, was put out on various listservs. One had to apply to participate. I put in an application along with thirty-six others of whom ten, of which I was one, were invited to participate. The project took place in Linz, Austria and was based at Ars Electronica. The actual circumstances were slightly different than the original call described, as the generator needed to power the projector was so large that a commercial truck rather than a pick-up was used. This necessitated getting permits for the truck to drive in certain places so the events were less "below the radar of potential regulators" than originally anticipated.



Brian Massumi, in his essay on the HUMO master class writes:

Art would leave the walls of the gallery behind to flit for a moment on the periphery of official urban vision, out of place, out of scale, out of nowhere. The image's arrival would momentarily alter the perceptual conditions of local space, crystallizing at least a vague sense of the unaccustomed possibilities it enfolds. Even if no legible message was sent, the anomaly of the image's very presence would signal a 'more' postulating the existence of an elsewhere beyond the conventional logic of that place.

(Massumi, 2003: 30)

In the contemporary city the pedestrian, the driver, the passenger are all used to being sold an ideology about a lifestyle one should aspire too. A lifestyle one can buy. Advertising rents the surfaces of the city bombarding the performers of the city's daily rituals with slogans, brands, and images. This is the context, which any projection onto the city's surface enters into.

Maybe I should say that advertising as a media suffers from over familiarity and the public go into a sort of zombie-zone when nothing really goes in and everything just washes over. Public projections if the content and context is smart and current can crack this so there is a heightened level of engagement.

(Milner, 2005)

Can an image inserted into this environment offer another reading, and alternative experience to advertising's call to consume and be consumed, this "more" which Massumi alludes to? Unlike the images on the bus these projected images would be of such scale that they could not be consciously avoided. They would momentarily interrupt and meld to whichever surfaces we turned the projector upon.



Imagine you are living in Linz Austria, and one night on your normal drive back to your domicile, you see a building that you see every night but on this night you see it differently. On this night the building has been augmented<sup>1</sup>. The abandoned apartment block that you see without seeing is now a surface wedded with changing images. Do you stop in order to examine the image more carefully? Is it something you see but don't register completely? Has it somehow altered your everyday? Does the maker of the image need to know what the viewer sees? If one sees art's purpose as experiential, interventionist, and to precipitate dialogue, does the dialogue need to be with the artist? If someone driving home, or walking en route from place to place, sees an image that somehow doesn't fit the accepted mould, and wonders about it and speaks to someone else about it hasn't something occurred? As fourteen artists augmented the surfaces of Linz, Austria and the nearby areas we began to put these questions to the test. Or more accurately the questions emerged out of the practice of quick fire projecting.

Upon my acceptance to the HUMO workshop I felt overwhelmed by the prospects. I was going to go to a city I had never been to and would project giant images onto its surfaces. The people of Linz would encounter my images at a huge scale; they would be large and bright and visible from long distances. Again I wondered what my responsibility to an unknown but possibly vast

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<sup>1</sup> Lev Manovich in *The Poetics of Augmented Space: Learning from Prada* defines augmented space as "the overlay of visual information in a physical space". (Manovich, 2002: 6)



audience was. Was it egotistical and invasive to project my images onto a city space? Was this a question corporations worried about when they pasted their newest campaigns on every purchasable surface? Of course not; so here was a chance to counter, intercede, or just create my own visual spectacle using the same scale of technology. The projections were incredibly bright and could be as large as 60 meters square and, truth be told, size matters, not in a bigger is better way but an image that can cover the whole façade of a twenty story building is unavoidable and I found the experience of working at such a scale empowering. By the end of the workshop I realised that Lozanno-Hemmer and Masumi had made a radical proposition by organising access to this type of high-end technology without a clear goal other than experimentation.

In preparation for the project my first instinct was to research the history of Linz. I discovered it was Hitler's birthplace and read of Hitler's triumphant return "home" during WWII. My own family history of Eastern European and Russian Jews who had to flee during that period made me particularly interested in this aspect of Linz's history. I began to develop dramatic ideas of making buildings seem to bleed and focussing on the scars of architecture. But when I arrived in Linz and began work I realised I felt uncomfortable with this approach. I was a tourist, an artist parachuting in for a week, and it was only on these terms that I could work. I became interested in what happened when images are blown up to such a large scale, how the material was changed by the building, and reacting with immediacy to a building's shape and purpose. The idea of





engaging an audience was more problematic for some of the artists taking part in the workshop whose practice often utilised audience participation but considering the time scale, I was quickly unconcerned with audience, again adopting the view that those who caught the momentary projections could make of it what they would. I wanted to create projections which interacted with the surfaces they illuminated, and perhaps caused a shift in perception, in that someone catching the moment would wonder why it was there or where it came from or just pause in general. Time in a city drives quickly forward and it seems a useful intervention to say stop for a moment, on your way to your next appointment, and wonder at something.

As soon as we attempted the first projections it was obvious that projection is a medium in itself and that much of the week would involve beginning to have an understanding of how to work with the projected image and what happened as it met with different type of surfaces. The building or structure projected upon was never just a simple surface, and sometimes it seemed to get in the way.

Again I quote Masumi:

In order to hijack a city site with an image, you have to deal with the possibility that the image might be hijacked by the site. This was precisely what was happening at first. There is no such thing, the group soon learned, as a simple 2D projection on a city surface. A building is not just a bigger screen. Its surface has a shallow depth of its own, due to the texture of its construction materials, which can give the image a strange, almost tactile thickness.

(Masumi, 2003: 41)



The realisation that "a building is not just a bigger screen" was paramount and the first projections were almost a disappointment as we struggled to make the images fit the contexts and the surfaces. Kristof Wodiczko, who has used projection as a primary medium, comments:

At first, people don't see architectural structures as images in themselves; they see them as physical surfaces, as screens for the projection. But keeping the image static helps to integrate it with the architecture.

(Wodiczko, 1999: 145)

In the first part of the week we randomly projected the images we had created that day onto different sites. Some worked better than others. Some created a dialogue with the place while others sat awkwardly. We realised some images worked in particular places and some didn't, and that a flat space was not necessarily the most evocative choice for a projection site. A collective awe was palatable when we turned the projector on under a highway overpass. The image bent and reconstructed itself to fill the space creating new shapes and constructions in the image itself as well as making the image something one could physically pass through.

We also didn't understand that although some images seemed to hardly surface close up they could be viewed clearly at a further distance. We realised vantage point was important when some of our party came later to a projection site explaining they had been able to see the images from at least a kilometre away. This is an important aspect of the medium of projection. In an interview,



Richard Milner, who has worked extensively with projection in public space, commented:

Scale can sometimes be best appreciated from a real distance rather than up close. I remember seeing Fourth Wall, which was showing Film and Video Work on the National Theatre Wall. The private view only allowed for visitors to view the work from close up, say like in a cinema. It was flat and it was dull. And everyone thought this (apart from the organisers!). Yet from the other side of the river against the London skyline it looked stunning and simple, like a tiny picture box. I think sometimes people get too close to a project and miss the real dynamics of projection.

(Milner, 2005)

As the week went on we gained proficiency and began to create images for particular sites, and to consider the context or architectural integrity of the spaces we were projecting upon. By projecting a grid onto the surface we were able to create guides to match the images to the lines of the surfaces. It was also possible to create a camera obscura image to create an exact guide if someone wanted to be extremely detailed. Each individual artist was able to construct images and interventions out of the interests of their own practice while at the same time we turned into a collective production team.

My first attempt to match image to site was for an abandoned apartment block in the suburb of Leondig. We had arranged with the guards (via a beer donation) that we could come and project there over several nights. I decided to create a film noir "The End" film still to project onto the building. I was happy with the match and began to think about a muralistic approach to projection. Using the grid method I developed a series of projections for a multiplex in Linz.



It was a fairly innocuous building except for two oddities: There were fake palm trees surrounding the building, and the side wall, which we had decided to project upon, was already being "painted" by a series of coloured lights. I was excited by the multiplex because of its lack of historical significance and because it was a building that housed projected images and was all about false constructions. Playing on the oddness of the fake palm trees, especially weird in the middle of a snowstorm, I developed a series of projections using some photographs I had taken of a seniors' water-aerobics class in Palm Springs California. The projections worked well and had a painterly feel to them while creating a sense of blended realities. After viewing these projections I began to realise that I didn't just have to paint the surfaces of the building but that perhaps I could use the image to change the shape or sense of the function of the building – but I didn't have time to try experiments such as those.

Projection is a medium such as any other, in that there is a skill to it, and it takes time and practice to develop a sense of its full possibilities. The projected image can enunciate ideological relationships and hidden meanings, change the experience of the every day encounter, make the familiar unfamiliar, or go unnoticed, a flicker of light seen out of the corner of an eye, and most importantly it is of the moment, ephemeral, and exists only as long as the light is thrown onto the chosen surface. The HUMO workshop served as a chance to experience the art of projection and open up ideas and questions but there was a general feeling that we needed another week in order to really begin to





respond with clear intention. In order to think through the possibilities of projection it is useful to look at the work of two other artist/s who have used the medium more regularly: Krystof Wodiczko and the guerilla project art critic.

Wodiczko has used projection to illuminate the hidden structures of power and control which buildings and monuments often represent. He writes:

What is implicit about the building must be exposed as explicit; the myth must be visually concretized and unmasked. The absentminded, hypnotic relation with architecture must be challenged by a conscious and critical public discourse taking place in front of the building.

The attack must be unexpected, frontal, and must come with the night, when the building, undisturbed by its daily functions, is asleep and when its body dreams of itself, when the architecture has its nightmares.

(Wodiczko, 1999: 47)

One of his most "unexpected, frontal" attacks was a 1985 projection of the Nazi symbol onto the South African consulate in London. While setting up for a sanctioned work commissioned by the ICA and Artangel Trust in Trafalgar Square, the projection of "an intercontinental ballistic missile wrapped up in barbed wire" onto Nelson's Column, he and his team turned the projector onto the consulate. As it happened there was an anti-apartheid demonstration scheduled that night and the Nazi symbol emblazoned onto the building for about two hours (Wodiczko, 1991) provided a background image for the protest. The police intervened and stopped the projection. Interestingly, those inside the building would not have been able to see the projection. Wodiczko's











*Fourth Wall*, PADT's ongoing programme of outdoor projections of artists' film and video, turns the National Theatre into a giant screen above the River Thames .... The *Fourth Wall* projections test the boundaries between art, theatre and film, performer and audience, viewer and viewed, inside and outside, and real and imaginary space.

(Public Art Development Trust Website)

What the *Fourth Wall* wasn't supposed to test was the idea of public space and who should be allowed to use it. When I questioned Sandra Percival, one of the *Fourth Wall* curators about the art critic intervention, she said:

It was not visible in relationship to FW projections nor was it to the audience so it had no effect on the event. We turned on the lights on that side of the building and that eliminated their image. The National considers this "trespassing" and thus will enforce and stop any unauthorized use of the space. It was done from a passing truck and they were reprimanded.

(Percival, 2005)

I find it interesting that a projection onto the side of the building could be considered trespassing and perhaps the police did too.

The police generally had a 'move along boys you've had your fun' view on what we were doing. All of this was of course pre-9/11, now I think if you drive around inner London in vans you would get more hassle.

(Poulter, 2005)

As to audience – that Percival felt their projection was not visible to the audience begs the question of who the audience actually was. Looking at the art critic documentation (fig 4) of the event it is clear that it was possible to see both projections from some angles. The audience of the sanctioned event, sat in front





of the projection as in a traditional theatre so could not see both projections. The idea that this was the only audience turns the outside space into a privatized space. Of course one can empathize with the idea that an intervention could be quite unnerving when one has spent time planning an event and Simon Poulter writes:

They really felt we had ruined their event. They had spent money, got permission and our show up and project attitude annoyed them. So they called the police.

(Poulter, 2005)

In considering art critic's "fifth wall" the parameters of the fourth wall become clear. The fourth wall, even if it is meant to dissolve "the boundaries between architecture, city, film and sky," (Percival, 2005) is still a space of control, really another enclosing wall. To be fair to Percival, the intention does not seem to be other.

FW functioned as an outdoor alternative to a gallery space; it was social and theatrical through its context at the National, a cultural producing space as many people know it.

(Percival, 2005)

It still seems to me that there are some paradoxes in this as this wasn't outside as in someone's back garden, but in London on a side of a building that was visible from large distances. Apparently as a "cultural producing space" it still needed to be curated - bringing the institutional kudos of the National onto its outside walls.

Art critic's idea that art can spoil art parties is an interesting mode of critique



and suggests that art serves different purposes depending on context and institutional or non/institutional support. Projection is the medium that gets you into the party, a gatecrasher's dream, where one can temporarily upstage the event or building itself.

On one hand projection lends itself to intervention because it is ephemeral and non-permanent and at the moment there are not laws that govern projected images – any problems encountered during projections usually have to do with permits to bring vehicles into particular spaces.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand the biggest impediment for artists who want to use large-scale projection is access to the high cost equipment. Unless there is a big budget, and this is rare for guerrilla style interventions, artists must find other ways to gain access. PANI, the company who made the projector used during the HUMO workshop donated the use of it for the week. Lozano-Hemmer had a track record with projection technology and PANI felt that artists might discover new ways to use their projectors, which are mostly used by corporate clients.

When I asked Richard Milner how more artists might get access to projection technologies he replied:

To get access to the kit more artists need to get aware of how to use the kit and to skill up and then they can start to work out exchanges. The main problem is negligence by artists. This kit is so expensive and there are rules in looking after kit. In truth, I would never pass on kit to artists I don't know without a tech. It's almost like there needs to be some sort of test or

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<sup>3</sup> During the HUMO workshop permits had to be secured at the last minute because a much larger truck had to be used because of the weight of the generator – the permits were for the truck to drive on certain roads and park in particular places.



exam so that the artist is accredited (very formal I know) and then everyone knows the kit is in safe hands. Then artists can dovetail other gigs and get hold of cheap kit, which is away from the hire companies anyway. Another thing that would help is if the artworld could just relax a little and be more ad hoc. So an artist could say - 'I might be able to blag some cheap kit for this gig, but please don't crucify me if it is hired out later on by the company and I can't get hold of it.' Companies have to make money you see but do sometimes co-operate if they are involved in something that allows them to blow you out if a big cash hire out comes in late in the day.

(Milner, 2005)

It seems to me that the idea of being ad-hoc, going with the flow, turning the tables late in the game is essential to the ethos of intervention. Interestingly with projection technologies it also involves a willingness to work with corporate entities in order to access the equipment. Wodiczko had not planned the projection onto the South African embassy, but was able to take advantage of the circumstances of a planned event. Art critic had access to the equipment as one of its members worked with projection as a "day job". The art critic projections were done after other work had been completed. This way the technologies are not only associated with advertising or corporate branding but have a presence in other arenas. Simon Poulter commented that:

There was a degree of caché for them (Projection Company) in doing guerilla projections, in that their show-reel looked more edgy and they got more work. Being the 'bad ass' crew was useful to them when they pitched to clients, mainly national newspapers and magazines.

(Poulter, 2005)

So the relationship can work both ways with the work done by artists reflecting back into a corporate entity that wants to create a more edgy or experimental image.



## Documenting the Ephemeral

Because projections are temporary the work is disseminated through documentation and the knowledge that it occurred. Wodiczko mentions that it is important not to let projections become permanent and that "slide projectors must be switched off before the image loses its impact and becomes vulnerable to appropriation by the building as a decoration." (1999: 48) Its ephemeral quality and impermanence is what gives its power as a critical comment. How does the trace of the image, or the erased image, stay in the public's mind? As in all performance, and this kind of projection can be seen as a performative act, the role of documentation comes into question. Does the document disseminate, prove, and make the act permanent? Does it situate it in the space of history as something that happened? Does the image of the projection somehow leave a mark on the site?

Wodiczko, commenting on the projection of the Nazi symbol, which was only projected for two hours, notes:

The trouble is that the projection did not change the situation either, but it harbored itself into the memory of the city to the point where in one of the local magazines the projection was selected as one of the most important events in the city - and my name was not even there! It was the name of the photographer. It was a very good picture because it showed why it carved itself into the city's memory - it was because of the media too, not only the thousands of people who saw it but because of the photographers who came from different newspapers.

(Wodiczko, 1991)



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Nick Kaye in his book *Site Specific Art* comments:

The relationship between Krzycztof Wodiczko's large-scale projections and their photographic documentation mirrors that between the images he employs and their architectural hosts . . . Documentation has a place with in site-specific practice precisely because it explicitly presents itself in the absence of its object.

(Kaye, 2000 : 217)

So perhaps the power of documentation is also its own negation – it can only include the absence of the site or the performance, rather than the actuality of the event and the place. This allows for the further spread of the event, the construction of myth around the event, and a contemporariness to its reading. It can also decontextualise the work in a way which dangerously changes the meaning from the artist's original intention.

The Independent wanted to feature the project but we turned them down. The work was in my head truly situational. You had to see it there and then, as a spectacle.

(Poulter, 2005)

This encapsulates the problem of documenting the immediate; especially the kind of work art critic was doing which was all about intervening into a particular context. Peggy Phelan, in her book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* makes this argument for the ontology of performance:

Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology.

(Phelan, 1996: 146)

Phillip Auslander, (whom I already cited in Chapter 2) opposing Phelan's



argument comments:

As the mediatized replaces the live within cultural economy, the live itself incorporates the mediatized, both technologically and epistemologically. The result of this implosion is that a seemingly secure opposition is now a site of anxiety...

(Auslander, 1999: 39)

If we accept the idea of a projection as a performance, as a live event with duration, then I find the idea of documentation as a "site of anxiety" a more interesting exploration. I do agree with Phelan that documentation isn't the thing in itself but something new. Documentation says this happened but you weren't there. Documentation says this thing, this performance, which is here represented in a still image, or on a video, or as a drawing, or through text, was experienced by a group of people in a particular place. Documentation says this has been done in the past; here is some proof: please give me the grant, commission, PhD. etc. Documentation can attempt to historicize and disseminate the ephemeral through a variety of media so that these happenings are not lost. Of course documentation can be faked. Hayley Newman in her project *Connotations – Performance Images 1994 -98* created, in a week, a series of photos of "faked" performances. Each performance is represented by a descriptive caption and an image of the performance. She writes:

The camera authenticates the activity in its position as witness and the photographic image stands in place of the performance and becomes the work itself.

(Newman, 2001: 39)

So for the viewer of the documentation when does it matter if the event has



occurred or not? One of Newman's faked performances is an image of her catapulted into a black space. The caption describes the event as the artist jumping on a trampoline in a dark room for three hours with the organiser instructed to take a single flash photo at some point during the event with no other photography allowed. (Newman, 2001:50) For the reader of this image and caption it is not important whether the event took place or not. There is enough information to evoke the event and so to imagine the experience. It is important whether the artist experienced the event or not as the intention is different. To jump on a trampoline for three hours in the dark would have been about duration, physical extremes, and the actual experience of the body in performance. To set up a photo shoot of an image, which represents the idea of the performance, is a project about the role of documentation and the capacity of the viewer of the documentation to re-enact the performance in his/her own mind.

In the call for participants for the HUMO Master Class it stated:

Documentation of these projects will be an integral part of the workshop, as the conditions of possibility of legal/political/aesthetic viability are fast, short interventions below the radar of potential regulators.

(Ars Electronica Web Site, 2003)

During the five nights of projections, no image was left up for more than a few minutes. Just long enough to make sure that it had been photographed and videoed from a variety of angles and points of views. Massumi comments:

Each projection event had been multiply recorded using an arsenal of digital video cameras, digital still cameras and traditional film cameras.



Each projection was caught from almost as many angles as a Los Angeles Police chase. HUMO participants were a self-effracting urban band. They iterated in their own events the 'over exposure' that Virilio sees as inherent to the contemporary city experience. The question, what for? was in the air even as the shutters were snapping.

(Massumi, 2003: 45)

It might have been possible to create similar types of images in Photoshop, overlaying an image onto one of a building, adjusting the opacity so as to imitate the quality of a projection. In actuality it would have been quite difficult to understand what happened when an image alighted onto a particular space. Imagine a band of fourteen artists driving under an overpass at one am, in a snowstorm, and projecting images into the tunnel like space, each column breaking and bending the image into a new form. The space and images were changed, reconstructed, and all the participants were amazed.

So what was HUMO for? Perhaps it was for nothing more than experimentation. Maybe this is subversive in itself. A group of fourteen artists were given access to expensive projection equipment that allowed the projected images to be inserted into the city at the level of advertising. Pani the company that manufactured the projector, donated its use so as to see what new applications might be found for the equipment. Ars Electronica provided a lab to create the images and slides in as well as administrative support and the city of Linz became a giant studio. It was quick, inventive, of the moment, sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't.





## The Wandering Bear

*Out Video 2004*

National Center for Contemporary Art

Ekaterinburg, Russia

OUT VIDEO International video-art festival in public spaces

The idea of the festival is to integrate contemporary video art into the public spaces of Ekaterinburg city. The festival public screenings will happen on outdoor video screens network of "IgRek Cinema" company, 10 city screens located in the most busy spots. Selected video art works will be shown during one month each day in the pauses between commercial blocks, altogether around 240 screenings per day. There are only two formal requirements to video works: **LENGTH - 30 SECONDS, NO SOUND**. The festival will end with the two nights video screenings of the entire festival program on all 10 city screens. The closing ceremony will include presentation of the best works in a cinema theatre and winners awarding.

(Out Video Website, 2004)

I answered the above public call for participation and sent six 30-second videos created from the various Bear projects. All were selected for presentation on the city screens of Ekaterinburg, Russia. Once again these screens were normally used for advertising, and were being parasited as a presentation space for "art".

A new context allows for a new reading and life for a work. Much of the imagery created for the Bear installations (discussed in chapter 2) was made in reference to particular landscapes. The Bears placed in various landscapes turned the spaces into sets for the Bear figures. Opportunities to re-present some of the imagery in different cities and different mediums has allowed for a further



development of the work and an inversion of this relationship. During the HUMO workshop I was able to project images of the bear onto buildings and structures. The Bear wandering around the moors of South West England was projected onto an abandoned apartment building in Leondig, Austria. The difference from being in a place (the moors) and on a place (an image wedded to a building) makes an odd image even stranger. It looked completely alien and as if it came from nowhere. Lorenzo Tripodi, one of the other artists who participated in the HUMO workshop, commented upon the "upsettingly intimate world suddenly springing from Anya's images" (Tripodi, 2003). Projected as singular stills the images had no clear context and created a kaleidoscope of displacement.

On May 15<sup>th</sup> 2004 a 30 second video of the bear being chased around a tree by a hunter was shown 240 times, in-between news and adverts, on ten screens in the city of Ekaterinburg. On the nights of June 5<sup>th</sup> and June 6<sup>th</sup> 2004 five other 30 second video moments taken from the various Bear projects were shown repeatedly on these same screens along with over 100 other 30 second artist made videos.

In *Grandma Baba and Little Boris*, Sophie, a Bouvier (a Belgian breed of Sheep Dog), portrayed 'the bear with the iron fur', a character found in some Russian fairy tales. It was during that project that Lara and I began to think of ourselves as bears, which evolved into the various bear projects. Somehow the bears



were always Russian so it seemed appropriate to send them to Ekaterinburg. I loved the idea of the bears emerging, scurrying, and appearing across the city of Ekaterinberg – almost as if they were going home. When I sent the videos to the festival they were received with excitement and I was told it was the festival organisers favourite entry. When *Grandma Baba and Little Boris* played at a festival in NovoSibirsk, Siberia, the director Maxim Zonof wrote “Everybody here loves Baba and Boris” and awarded the video a special prize of “Best Folklore Experiment.” (Zonof, 2001) So maybe we are getting something right as to some sort of Russian sensibility . . .

In early musings about the difference between video and film it was often pointed out that film was viewed from a light projected at a screen while video was seen as a light emitting from a monitor. Now video can be projected at such a high resolution that this distinction is not viable but it could be useful to consider the difference between public projections and public screens.

Projections can be aimed at a particular place and can change surfaces – the light emitted from the projector wraps the surface or object in its image and vice versa with the building or surface changing the image. Public Screens are created for media input and need to be fed imagery. The work needs to be programmed so it is a harder space to intervene into without permission and funding.

Out Video like the CEPA Bus Show was a planned intervention into the space of



advertising and in this case also news. Artist made videos were interspersed into the regular feed of information and commercials. Similarly to the CEPA Bus Project, I wonder how these videos were read? Were the videos subsumed by the context of advertising or did they change the screen by their presence? In the Out Video festival each video is supported by an out video intro, which announces the project. I imagine this offers some clarification to viewers about what they are seeing. I have been unable to get any feedback about some of the issues of public response but the festival must have been a success in some sense as it is happening again this year (2005). A good comparison to the Out Video Festival can be found in the work of STRICTLY PUBLIC, an artist group based in Dusseldorf, Germany. Since 2000 they have worked with media art in public spaces.

Video screening boards currently used to display news, information and commercial advertisements in public places are the preferred medium of STRICTLY PUBLIC. These boards serve as a canvas for media art.

(STRICTLY PUBLIC Website)

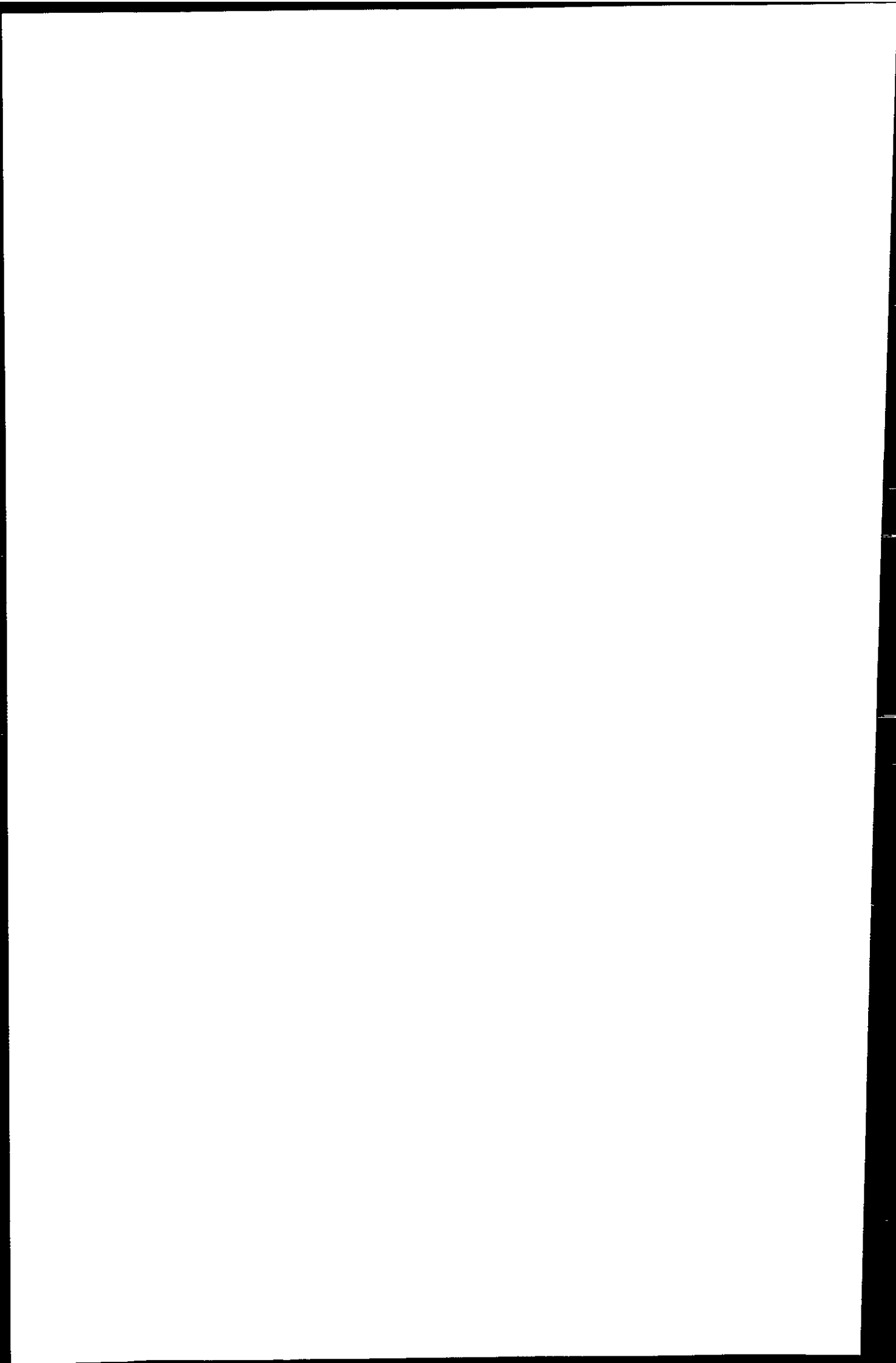
They are particularly interested in intervening, or as they put it interweaving, into the space of advertising and commerce. On their website they declare:

The interweaving of commercial information with works of art accentuates the contrast between the two disciplines. The attentive viewer will sense the tension produced by the opposing types of content and experience an unexpected and unique visual quickening. Thus art is brought out to the city, its streets and its people and the otherwise mundane urban landscape becomes alive with artistic expression.

(STRICTLY PUBLIC Website)

From January 30, 2004 to February 19 2004 they created a program called *Fly*





*Utopia* in Berlin. Ten artists' videos were played 96 times a day on a giant LED video screen at the busy area of Kurfürstendamm-Corner. In their description of this project the wording is a mixture of questioning and proclaiming.

What may art provide on a display / screen in a public area? Can the retreat into privacy be interrupted and urban social life be stimulated through encountering art by surprise? What happens to a viewer, who allows himself to stop and to watch? Suddenly no messages of agencies, publishing houses, federations and manufacturers will be displayed. The board will then be a public window, an utopian part of our reality. A platform for a "daydream": True or false, reality or dream? Utopia is only conceivable if it already germinates in reality.

(STRICTLY PUBLIC Website)

Like Debord's flood of desires STRICTLY PUBLIC imagines the need to create alternative images in real spaces in the hope that these images will than change the frame of reference. How does one know what the audience response really is for a project with no clear audience? STRICTLY PUBLIC attempted to begin to answer this by commissioning Mirjam Struppek to spend two days doing a public questionnaire at the site. Her description of the first part of the event is somewhat reminiscent of my experience of riding the bus with my work in Buffalo.

For two days I went out. It was cold and people walking with turned up collars seemed to protect their attention neglecting the outer world constantly trying to catch their attention...I noticed a few people randomly looking at the screen while waiting for the traffic light to change. But their gaze, was it just caught by the flickering light or did some message of the one minute clip reach their brain.?

(Struppek, 2005: 2)

Struppek ends up settling at a bus stop with a view of the screen to complete the survey as the people who are waiting anyway are the most willing to stop and



talk. She completed 35 questionnaires during the two days.

Through the questionnaire it was revealed that very little people noticed there was something different on the screen, interrupting the usual program. In fact the art was not differently perceived from the ads. Yet the idea of Art, of the possibility to see art was almost welcomed by everyone.

(Struppek, 2005: 2)

So although people were open to the idea of 'art' on the screens they weren't sure what that might look like. Struppek wonders if they are only interested in art as entertainment and if people in their daily routine really want to be interrupted by art – especially if it is a work that is asking for something back. Like myself she is unsure if art in commercial spaces can challenge the frame of consumerism or if people's behaviour relates to the mode of delivery more than the content.

If Video Art tries to use these strongly determined forms of media that have inscribed already such a clear association with commercial content, does it automatically also support the function, does it give additional power to the medium.

(Struppek, 2005: 3)

She goes on to speculate if these kinds of art projects might even be in the service of the advertisements in catching the attention of a public who has learned not to look at the flood of advertising with what she terms "art-candy".  
(2005: 3)

It is important to question the motivation and use of these public screens and



further experimentation needs to happen in order to understand how these spaces can be used. Lira Nikolovska suggests the need to test the way people behave in social spaces with these types of content delivery systems. She looks to sociologists Irving Goffman and Norman Ashcraft's studies of peoples' behaviour in social settings but argues that these kinds of sociological studies need to be combined with technical specifications and the context of the particular spaces.

Each act is linked, networked with other factors (either technical, cultural, sociological, natural, political, etc.) and doesn't exist as a neutral isolated object...public displays are not neutral objects, nor is the activity of engaging with them isolated.

(Nikolovska, 2004: 5)

I agree with her that projects should be tested and thought through on these varying levels but I would be wary of creating work that was solely in response to these studies – art then becomes like advertising where response is attempted to be predetermined. Artists should continue to intervene into public media spaces in both agreed and impromptu manners. The work should interrogate the use of space and hopefully create new ways of seeing and occupying public spaces.

The uncertainty of need is an underlying question in my consideration of all these projects. If an artist places work in a public arena, especially one usually understood as an advertising space, in order to catch the attention of an



unknowing passer-by is the artist looking to perceive and to fulfil some need? Or is the artist creating a need as in advertising? By placing art in the space of advertising there is an assumption that something other than advertising should be offered. But what? Vito Acconci, in an interview in 2004, comments about his shift away from situating his work in art galleries:

I gradually realized I was more interested in the casual passer-by in the city. The person who stops at something not because it is labeled as art, but for some reason or another it connects with this person's life. Another way of putting it is that I gradually realized I was more interested in applied art than pure art. I realized I was more interested in a spoon, a glass, a table, a chair than I was in stuff supposedly called art.

(Acconci, 2004)

Here Acconci is emphasizing the choice of the passer-by to view something that catches his or her attention, and maybe it is this idea of choice that is important. To go back to my bus project I was disappointed because no-one examined it while I was present but perhaps after I got off someone chose to spend some time with the work. Advertising takes place in public space but it is not an accessible space unless one can buy it, or one just decides to intervene in it, or a public body uses part of advertising space as a canvas for art. It is important for this space to become more truly public and to be used by a variety of types of projects.





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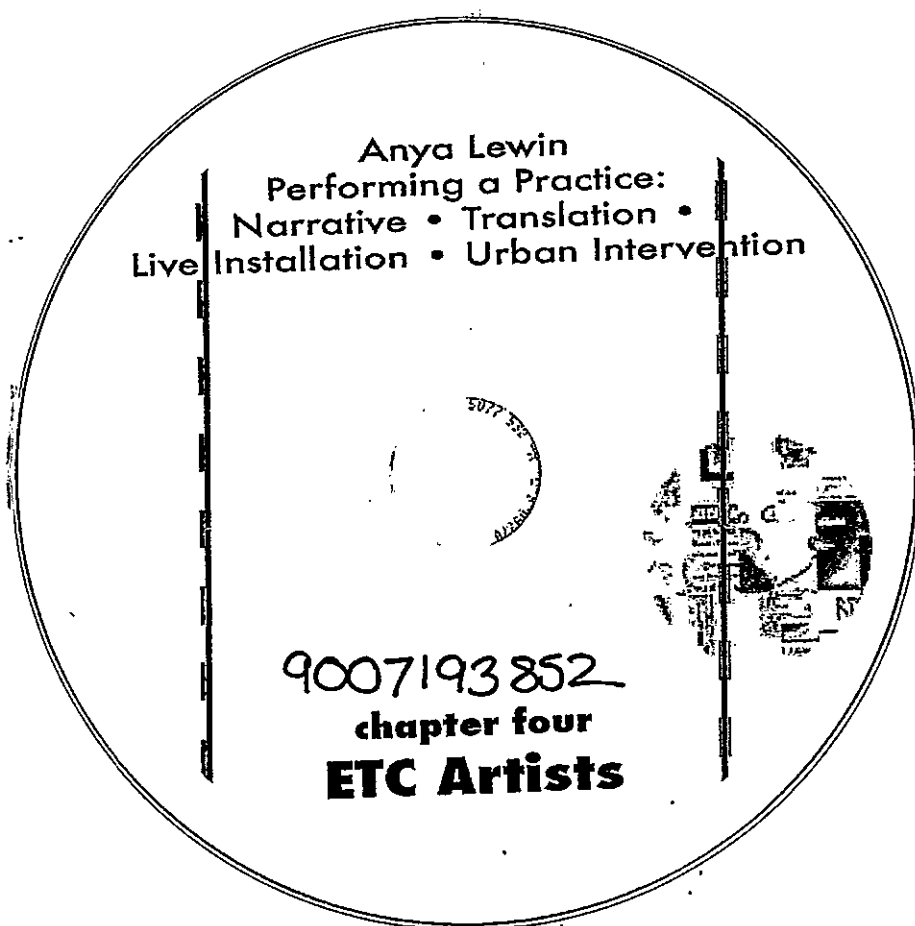
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DVD



CAUTION –  
DO NOT USE  
DAMAGED CDs



## Chapter 4: Etc-Artists

Artists actively inhabit cultural and social forms.

(Bourriaud, 2002: 12)

It is a common idea that art practice is often no longer solely a medium specific endeavour. One of course still might define oneself as a painter or a filmmaker but the term artist itself has taken on an expanded definition and often has a sociological element. Nicolas Bourriaud in his book *Relational Aesthetics* writes about:

An art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space.

(Baurriaud, 2002: 14)

The practice of art is never truly singular, and as Becky Shaw points out is produced by a "complex web of actors" (Shaw, 8) who create the spaces and hierarchies of production, distribution and viewing. One equation in this system is for the artist to create the work while curators and institutions act as gatekeepers and producers of distribution networks. The artist works alone in his or her studio waiting for a visit from the curator who will find him or her an audience and economic structure to support the work. But often artists do not want to play into these structures or indeed wait for an opportunity, which may never arrive, so decide to develop distribution networks for themselves and others. Ricardo Basbaum uses the term "etc-artists" to describe artists who curate, write, create networks, or engage in other activities as part of or on top of their practice. (Basbaum, 2003) I find this an engaging term as it implies no





expertise but rather a *why not* or *why shouldn't I* sensibility that denies the need for a title such as curator or artist or project manager. The question of what one is (artist or curator?) seems to be an issue within the professionalized art world. When an artist develops his/her own gallery, exhibition space, or festival is this an extension of his/her artistic practice or is it a development of a curatorial or producer pathway? Can these elements be combined while still retaining the identity of producing artist?

From 1997 -2000 I ran Cornershop a gallery/exhibition/performance/studio space in Buffalo, NY. I will consider questions around the expanded role of an artist as well as the ethos of artist run spaces compared to institutional structures through a reflection upon that experience. I will also consider the projects of three other individual artists who have taken on the role of distribution of other artists work while maintaining their own practice. Steven Eastwood is a film artist who has been at the forefront of OMSK (1995 - present) a collective, which creates nomadic carnivalesque events in a "number of different spaces where artists can bring their diverse practices ... and audiences are quite involved in the work. No two people experience the same kind of chronology of pieces through an evening." (Eastwood, 2005) Louise Short is an artist who runs Station on the docks in Bristol (2000 -present). Station is "a research space" where she "commissions artists to make new work for this context or a project." (Short, 2005) Kirsten Lavers runs the Taxi Gallery (2002 -2005) in Cambridge, a disused Black Cab, which is situated on the front lawn of Lavers' council house



and is the site for which artists create works. I have chosen these artists and their projects because they are all strong personalities who have a particular take on the role of artists in these ventures. I have also chosen to look at individual artists who develop exhibition opportunities rather than artist groups<sup>1</sup> as that compares most closely to Cornershop. I would also note that all of these spaces have a collective nature because they involve other people in many aspects even if it is a single person's project and they are all important constructors of social space. It must be noted that the context of funding for these initiatives in England is different than the situation in the US at the time I was doing Cornershop and that of course this affects the developmental process of the projects. Though I will take this into account it is of less importance for me than the identity of the artist who situates him/herself out side of the traditional role of individual producer.

Cornershop was literally a shop on the corner that formed most of the first floor of a duplex<sup>2</sup>. It was in a residential working class Italian neighbourhood close to the Niagara River. Robert Creeley, in a text he wrote for the Cornershop archive, wrote about the area:

Houses here are still insistentlly "single dwellings" and despite the poverty there is a persisting sense of neighbourhood. So someone coming in is really looked over, not hostilely but particularly.

(Creeley, 2004)

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<sup>1</sup> OMSK is a collective but Steven Eastwood had an initiating role in it and for some years ran it himself so I am concentrating on his input rather than the collective structure.

<sup>2</sup> An American term, which means a single house, split into two living units.



There were no other art venues in the area. I lived in the flat above Cornershop, and my landlords lived in the other half of the house. It became part of both of our domestic situations and part of the neighbourhood. When I moved in the shop was boarded up and had been disused for 20 years. One day while I was working in the shop, preparing it to become Cornershop, Guido an old man who lived down the street stopped by. He showed me how everything was laid out when Eddy had run it as a corner store. I decided to retain some of its eccentricities and "shop" qualities while adding obvious gallery elements. So while the walls were painted gallery white and track lighting was installed I left the vinyl letters on one of the windows, which read "tea and salada." A large window opened up onto the street inviting the neighbourhood in and interrupting the "white cube" feeling. Its most distinctive feature was a large radiator standing exactly in the middle of the space, which I painted metallic silver. As Buffalo is extremely cold during the snowy winter months this was an important element of the space.

Space is a practiced place

(De Certeau, 1984: 117)

Cornershop was basically four walls and a heater but during the three years that it ran it was invigorated into a live space of exchange where the social interaction of the audience was as important as the event taking place. Everything ran for only one night, the opening was the show, and the performative element of the endeavour was essential. Cornershop was not a



controlled situation with a formal strategy but I did have some ideas about what I wanted to happen.

1. It would be both local and non-local at the same time.

During the three years it ran there were more than 50 events<sup>3</sup> and Artists came from all over to present work while it also provided a venue for local artists. I didn't want it to feel local as in provincial yet at the same time it was important to me that it had a casual atmosphere and that anyone might come. It was part of Buffalo, part of my neighbourhood, but not imposed on anyone.

2. It would be interdisciplinary

Because all kinds of events were held in Cornershop – film screenings, poetry readings, installations, music, visual art, performance etc. an audience was built up for the space and whatever event happened there. It allowed people to expand what they would experience and merged audiences, which had been atomised.

3. Buffalo is a University town – it would provide a place away from the institution.

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<sup>3</sup> Please view the Cornershop archive in order to see documentation of many of these events.





Although Cornershop's audience was largely made of SUNY at Buffalo graduate students it also provided a place away from the institutional framework and for mixing with the local Buffalo arts scene and those few from the neighbourhood who sometimes came to events. It acted as a social forum in which people from different networks connected.

An exhibition will give rise to a specific "arena of exchange" Art is a state of encounter.

(Bourriaud, 2002: 18)

I wanted Cornershop to be a place where an encounter could take place. Where things were light hearted enough to be serious about art. The rest I made up as and when I needed. The necessity to improvise when only scant resources are available is familiar territory for many artists and is a useful skill when creating a space for the discourse and distribution of art that is funded by energy and action rather than any economic base.

### The Non-expert

Irresponsible people in responsible positions can provoke quite important developments.

(Gillick, 1993: 18)

The idea that one can make things up as one goes along is probably a hall mark of artist run organisations especially before they have developed and have to respond to funding bodies or become institutions in themselves.



Steven Eastwood said of OMSK:

I think the thing with OMSK was...we were always or I was always trying to get to what felt like OMSK ... I was always refining what OMSK was after each event. So in that sense it's a creative process, I'm definitely thinking as I'm doing it. I don't think that we got to the locked off "this is OMSK" event.

(Eastwood, 2005)

Louise Short commented about running Station:

I like to often do what I say I'll not do - to contradict myself -

And when I asked her how she picked the artists she worked with she replied:

It has been quite unthought actually. It might be that there are slots, or a particular way someone might approach me, and a particular focus that they might have which I think is interesting and I'll go for it but I've got to feel that I get something out of it.

(Short, 2005)

And Kirsten Lavers wrote:

I've felt mostly that I've been making it up as I go along ... I think models are only useful to an extent - its important to pay attention to the particularities of the context in which you are working, models can get in the way.

(Lavers, 2005)

Each of these artists has pursued these projects because of an interest in controlling the way art is received and displayed, in exploring the creative possibilities of making spaces, and a willingness to try things out without being sure where they are going. An artist run space is not necessarily better than one administered by an official curator or arts administrator and Liam Gillick warns:

The idea that a show organised by an artist is essentially more worthy than a show put together by a gallery works against a pointed and radical reassessment of how art could now be in the sense that it reinforces the idea that artists are fundamentally interesting and operating



under a different (read higher) moral code than anyone else,  
especially art dealers.

(Gillick 1993: 16, as quoted in Shaw: 2)

Like any artistic project the content must be there not just a context and there is no guarantee that artist run projects challenge the status quo but perhaps artist run spaces merge in a different way with the work they present.

When artists curate, they cannot avoid mixing their artistic investigations with the proposed curatorial project: for me, this is the strength and singularity they bring to curating.

(Basbaum, 2003, as quoted in Shaw, 3)

As most artist run spaces do not provide the artist (especially in the beginning period) with economic rewards they must provide something else - a creative outlet or opportunity to construct the environment they would like to have for the artistic encounter. Cornershop, OMSK, Station and Taxi Gallery all succeed/ed in providing a very particular experience that is imbued with the individual sensibility of the artist forefronting the project while still leaving the experience open for change brought by engagement with the artists whose work is being shown. Each project has its own atmosphere emphasizing that there is no one way in which artists believe art should be produced and shown. This is quite different from most museums and institutions, which often hide their processes and only deliver a product, sometimes with a curatorial signature, but carefully encased in the "white cube."

The modern gallery/museum space, for instance, with its stark white walls, artificial lighting (no windows), controlled climate and pristine architectonics, was perceived not solely in terms of basic dimensions and proportions but as an institutional disguise, a normative exhibition



convention serving an ideological function.

(Kwon, 2004: 13)

To go back to Liam Gillick's point I do not mean, in exploring Artist run spaces, to make the mistake of imagining that museums and galleries are bad while artist run spaces are good but to examine the ideology of presentation. Artist run spaces often have to make do with much less resourcing causing the insides to be more on display and perhaps making the ideology more readable than the "tabula rasa" of the traditional art venue but as Douglas Crimp acknowledges in *The Ruins of the Museum*:

The institution does not exert its power only negatively – to remove the work of art from the praxis of life – but positively – to produce a specific relation between artwork and spectator.

(Crimp, 1995: 27)

So no matter the size and the economic structure supporting the presentation of an exhibition or event there is a relationship being constructed with an audience. Artist run spaces insert themselves into the system of art in many different ways – as irritants, alternatives, support networks, or just another gallery and their role often changes as the organisation develops and as their influence begins to be felt. But artist run initiatives rarely can afford the distance an employee of a museum might be able to construct and the project is a part of their everyday. Sometimes this is used quite purposefully as in Kirsten Lavers placing Taxi Gallery in her front lawn and in the fact that I lived above Cornershop and that the audience used the lavatory in my apartment during events blending my domestic space with the construct of Cornershop. But this





everyday can also be oppressive with the artist feeling that the commitment to the project and other artists is eating away at the time for their practice, bringing up the question of how much these projects actually are part of an artistic practice.

### What am I?

Every artist who takes on the role of curator, producer, programmer, or whatever label they decide upon or is put upon them will ask themselves or be asked what it is they are? Have they given up their artist practice to become a curator or are they an artist-curator or both or neither?

All the artists interviewed (including myself) shied away from the term curator but had different ways of describing their activities. All felt that their projects were either their artistic practice or an aspect of it.

I'm an artist who uses curatorial strategies within my work. I'm interested that it is the artist/art world audience for Taxi Gallery that has struggled and questioned most my assertion that Taxi Gallery is an artwork- I am constantly being asked about my 'own' work and am met with confusion and raised eyebrows when I say that Taxi Gallery is my "own" work. Whereas the local audience, my neighbours etc when they ask "what do you do?" and I reply I'm an artist seem to be able to put this reply together with their experiences of Taxi Gallery quite comfortably. Interesting that in this area the 'arts' audience of Taxi Gallery has revealed itself as clinging to a conventional view of what an artist is and the local audience so much more "radical".

(Lavers, 2005)

I don't think I'm a curator, no...(OMSK) is more like a gig so for me the artist role would sometimes drop away and the production management role would come up although quite a few people would say to me that they felt like the work was OMSK and that all of the individual pieces



were elements in that work so I suppose I could say that OMSK was my practice for a while.

(Eastwood , 2005)

I saw it (Station) as a found object that could be responded to. A lot of people are critical of that. They say you've got to decide if you are a curator or an artist because it is too difficult to do both well and I said I am not a curator I just project manage the artists that make the work and I work with them in the context in a collaborative way... and I still practice as an artist and you know people often need to pigeon hole you in a particular role in order to understand some kind of power relationship.

(Short, 2005)

Cornershop was the project and that's why I never felt the need to show my own work there, —because I felt like it was one of the projects I did and that it connected to my own arts practice (it was educating me and I was looking at lots of art). And all the physicality of dealing with the space was very important to me. Though I had critical ideas about the diversity of work I wanted to show and the energy of the space, basically my curatorial measurement was, "Do I feel like mopping the floor for you when you're done?" "Yes"—then sure. But if I knew the person and I thought "No way!" then it was "No, you can't come" and that was fine; it was my place and I could make a decision based on that if I wanted to. I could be eccentric.

(Lewin, 2005)

I suspect that one reason that everyone shied away from the term curator is that it would remove him or her too much from the identity of a practicing artist. In my experience of running Cornershop one of the problems I encountered is that it becomes so much of your perceived identity that people only see you in the role of putting forward other artists work and less as an artist who is producing a variety of work.

Many artists start distribution and exhibition activities as a way to promote their own practice along-side other artists' works that they find interesting or feel



connected to in the conditions they want to exhibit in; but not all artists feel comfortable in promoting their own work within the constructs they create, which as Ruth Claxton points out, creates:

a complex dilemma...whilst there is nothing to be gained through uncritical, self-promotion this situation often becomes paradoxical- as an artist with an active practice you perceive a need to change the environment which you work and yet there is an implication you shouldn't be directly benefiting from this investment...Providing opportunities is a generous act, but it seems problematic when there is an expectation that it is altruistic.

(Claxton , 2005: 7)

I felt uncomfortable showing my own work in Cornershop, and in the three years only participated in one group video show, which I organised. I was showing work in other venues at the time and it wasn't as if I had work that I wanted to show at Cornershop but denied myself the opportunity - I felt the separation was important because I didn't want it to feel like self-promotion. Cornershop for me was a very social project where I created a space with a buzz, and got the opportunity to meet many different kinds of artists and spend time with them. Artists who came from out of town stayed with me and this was usually a good thing and a way in which I created a network of connections outside of Buffalo. I am a shy person at heart and Cornershop allowed me the social encounter I craved with a clear role, which I could operate from. I preferred to be the bartender rather than the customer.

Similarly Louise Short has never exhibited her own work in Station. She also emphasized the social aspect:



I am one of those rare people who like private views – the party – talking about art – to have a space for conversation.

She also mentioned that although she didn't promote her own work through Station sometimes running it benefits her by affording opportunities and invitations to concentrate on her own work:

I was recently on an exchange to go to Croatia and two Croatian artists came here – This was because I had a place to offer. There was no equivalent in Croatia. This opportunity came up with some other artist led projects – we had created so many opportunities – so you get an opportunity now

(Short, 2005)

Steven Eastwood took a different view and has always felt comfortable showing his own work at an OMSK event. In fact OMSK was developed out of a frustration with the lack of exhibition opportunities he and other artists had for their work. An important element of OMSK is that it is a place to try out new work so for Steven "If I've got something new I want to show I'll show it."(Eastwood, 2005)

And when I asked Kirsten Lavers if she ever featured her own projects she answered:

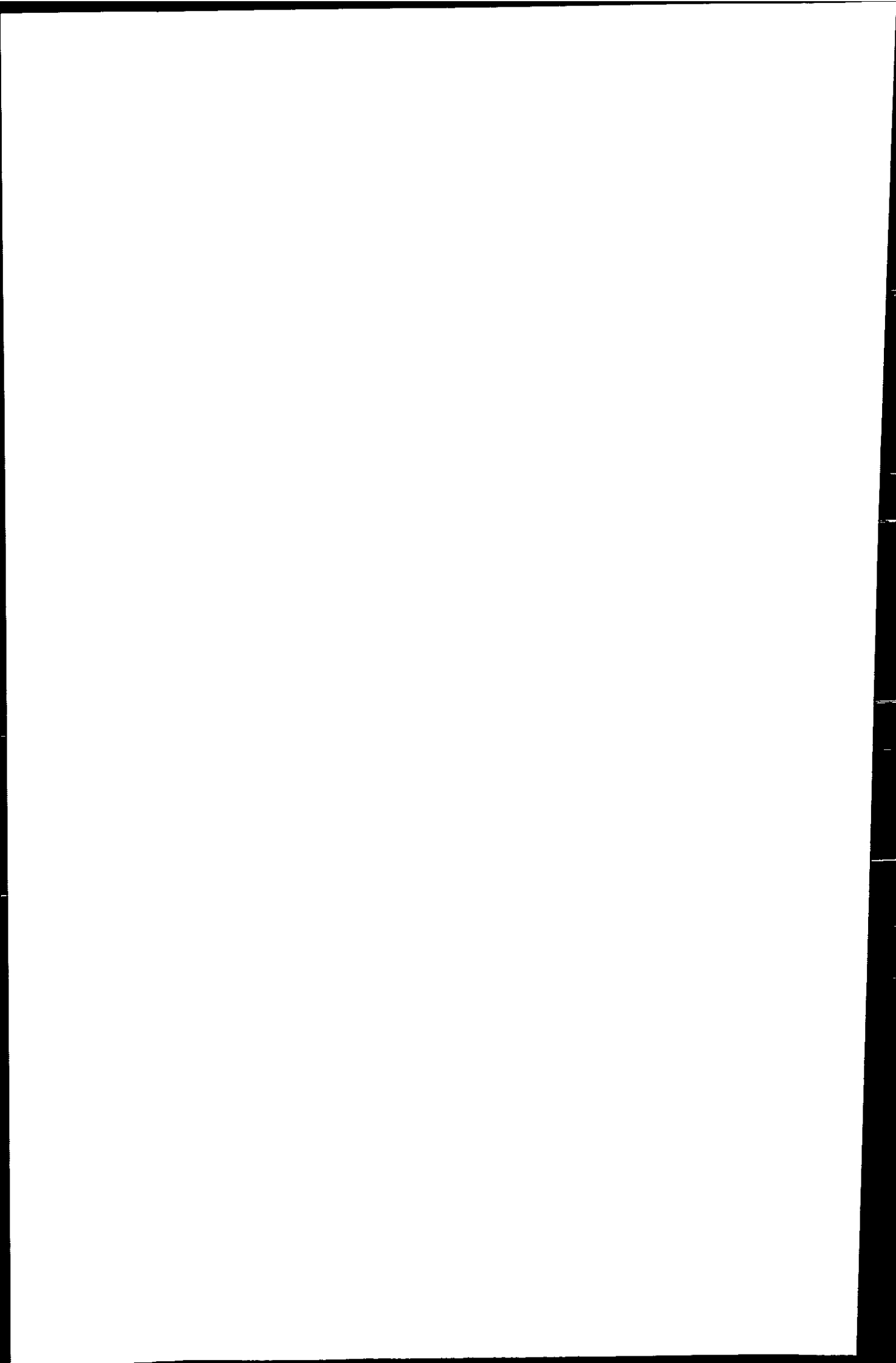
The flip answer would be Taxi Gallery IS my own work ... but also yes I have made individual projects.

(Lavers, 2005)

But equally when I asked why a person decides to create opportunities for others they put emphasis on the social element of their projects.

These contexts provided an opportunity for artists to work alongside each other to work on projects together to talk about work to receive feedback





and support – I've really enjoyed and learnt a great deal from each of the artists who has come to install work and I hope this has been reciprocated – I've received as much as I've given – so many of the art world contexts place artists in competition with each other for commissions, reviews, funding etc – I think artists want to meet with fellow artists in creative and supportive contexts where real exchange can occur.

(Lavers, 2005)

I think you have to like people and you have to like bringing your work into contact with others' work. A bit like when you go to a festival and OMSK has often been compared to a festival environment where there is discussion and afterwards people will talk about what they did. You have...to be an artist that wants to let your work be informed by other peoples work rather than be that kind of – you know you go off into your studio and you produce and then when it's done you take it out.

(Eastwood, 2005)

Whatever an artist's decision about including his or her own work running these events and spaces is a time consuming activity, and for any artist who seeks an active practice, time is important. When I asked Steven Eastwood if OMSK ever detracted from his practice he responded:

People still call me Steven of OMSK –even though I am not so involved in events now and I think for a time people didn't – I wasn't as much a filmmaker as I was the person who did OMSK so I made a conscious decision to cut back on OMSK and since then I've fully focussed on my work.

(Eastwood, 2005)

Louise Short felt that although running Station sometimes detracted from her practice in terms of time she also made the point that it was important in constructing a shift "away from being an artist that produced sculptural work and installation to an artist that focussed on the situation and the context."

But for Kirsten Lavers my question as to whether Taxi Gallery added to or



detracted from her practice missed the point and her answer was:

Taxi Gallery IS my own practice.

(Lavers , 2005)

Louise Short's comment that people "need to pigeon hole you in order to understand power relationships" is worth going back to. In the multi-disciplinary multi-media saturated culture that is the context for current art production it is interesting that there would be any question about artists taking on a multi-faceted role as both producers and distributors. Perhaps it is the fact that it does expose power relations and constructions in the art system that makes it an issue. After Cornershop had been running for about four months another artist told me that I had become "the institution". He was annoyed because he had wanted to use Cornershop for his own purposes more than I was willing. So in our small power struggle, and my sense of asserting my own vision upon Cornershop, he designated me as the villainous institution. I found this extremely amusing but it does point to a sense that there is a cycle in which the alternative becomes the mainstream.

### Politics and Opposition

Artists were fed up with the whole cultural-industrial complex with its market orientation, pecking orders, and functionaries, from critics to curators to collectors. Gatekeepers and tastemakers came to be seen as unnecessary obstacles to the dissemination of art, roadblocks to be circumnavigated. Many artists were intent on controlling how their artwork was used, striving to create a context free from the commercial corruption of the art market.

(Goldbard, 2002: 184)



There is a politics in everything and I have never understood the statement "I am apolitical", as it seems to me that in itself is a political position. When an artist sets up a space it is usually because they perceive a need to control the reception of art or to offer an alternative to what is available or to set up a clear opposition to the existing institutional frameworks. Sometimes the politics of a space is obvious and laid out in manifestos and declarations in other cases it is more subtly embedded into the ethos and daily operations.

Cornershop had a politics to it in that I felt art could be both playful and serious at the same time and that it did not have to be divided by discipline. It was very handmade, sometimes casual, but I meant it. Most important was the idea that I did not have to sit on one side or another of the consumption and production relationship. I could do both and it wasn't about making money although it was important that artists felt their work was valued. Every artist who showed at Cornershop was paid a fee. At first it was just a portion of donations collected by passing the hat but as I got better at running things I was able to pay a set rate. I thought of everything as a performance whether it was displaying visual art or performing the work in a more traditional sense and artists were paid as if it was a gig. Occasionally artists sold work from showing at Cornershop but I never took a commission. I remember being shocked one night at an event when a young woman asked me how much the artist had paid to show his work at Cornershop and I think she was shocked in return when I replied that he had paid nothing and in fact I had paid him.



The museum and gallery on the one hand and the studio on the other are linked to form the foundation of the same edifice and the same system. To question one while leaving the other intact accomplishes nothing. Analysis of the art system must inevitably be undertaken in terms of the studio as the unique space of production and the museum as the unique space of reception.

(Buren as quoted by Crimp, 1995: 210)

Station, Taxi Gallery, and OMSK also have a politics embedded in their vision and operation. Each in their own way questions the separation of production and reception and offers alternative modalities. Station emphasises itself as a research space where the process of preparing an exhibition is as open as the exhibition itself. OMSK provides a testing ground for new and unfinished work and looks to provide a space "where everything can go wrong." Taxi Gallery offers artists the opportunity to graft onto someone else's art practice and to continually reinvent the taxi. The commonality between all four projects is a DIY ethic of making something you want to see and experience happen but each operates/ed in different arenas and in response to particular sensibilities.

Louise Short comes out of a fine art background and one senses that much of the politics and decisions about how Station operates comes out of a response to an intimate knowledge of that system.

In my practice I am wary of producing work that can't be understood by anyone. I hold the same policy for Station. The artist, or myself, or a student is always here and they know the work intimately so that they can answer questions and also get response and feed back to the artist. It's an exchange system... it is an agreement between me and the artists I work with that they negotiate and I negotiate a certain kind of place for ourselves that involves a practice of mutual understanding that's a bit





beyond just presenting their work and enters into a kind of dialogue

I mean there is a degree of militancy here. I try and promote that militancy... Station isn't for hire - it's against the ideology. It's a control issue. Every show can't be brilliant but the terms are different...

(Short, 2005)

OMSK operates more in the late night music type scene and it has an anarchic irreverent feel to it. The sentiment is not so much that it is a reconsideration of the implicit rules of the art system but rather an event that doesn't particularly care about the art system and is looking to create an alternative to mainstream entertainment.

What I really liked about OMSK was it was a one off; every event was a one off and there was no way that you could repeat it. And I think that is something we are going to see more of somehow. I think people want resistant events and people want to be part of that resistance and people want something that is present. People want to be at something that isn't actually going to happen again and that they were there rather than something that is always mediated or duplicated. That's what I enjoyed about OMSK it was a picnic or a party.

(Eastwood, 2005)

Taxi Gallery feels the most like an art project, which other people connect to and become part of. An important part of its politics is the idea of the lack of separation of art from every day life.

It's a manifestation of my personal politics - politics with a small p maybe - its not campaigning on a particular agenda - there's politics in everything you do from the way you shop to the way that you interact with people.

(Lavers, 2005)

Cornershop was partially a reaction to the institutional feel and boundaries of the University of Buffalo and the awkwardness of trying to put together creative



activities on a campus that had been designed by architects who also designed prisons and which had been built to create a suburb away from the city. It was to some extent an outgrowth of the institution but it could do what the University could not do – be quickly responsive, integrate into the city, and allow for a important casualness where conversations could be had, relationships created, and beer was always affordable. (From the first event to the last beer was one dollar a bottle.)

No matter the context that all these projects work in (and there is not just one for any of them as context is a variant of location and timing and other particularities) all do present art. So is it necessarily part of their politics that they create an oppositional space for experiencing art?

I certainly set it (Station) up shortly after I had a major show at the Arnolfini and I felt that my position as an artist in relation to a big public gallery like the Arnolfini – being provided with an opportunity that was really special was actually made disappointing as an artist ...I want a much more focussed and opportunistic kind of place that audiences and artists get together in the process of making artworks and the door always stays open and the public can come in if there is a project being installed or made and that felt really important to me – that it wasn't about presenting people with a finished project.

(Short, 2005)

I've always felt that OMSK had a Situationist bent to it. It's never canonised the artist or elevated them that far above the audience and that's one interesting element. It's not theatrical in the way that the gallery is in that nobody is directed in how they should look at a piece of work and there isn't that kind of – OMSK isn't a sacred arts space so I think that there are some interesting attributes to the event that critique other ways of seeing art.

(Eastwood, 2005)

Not oppositional - just an alternative – galleries are fine – they have their



place – and have an important role to play in supporting artists and cultural activity - its just there are things that they can't do, types of work that just can't operate within the gallery system – Taxi Gallery is one such type of work

(Lavers, 2005)

Cornershop wasn't a thought out opposition to established art structures. Its opposition was more in that it never occurred to me that I couldn't open a venue and just make it work on my own energy and enthusiasm. There were conditions, which made Cornershop possible, such as cheap rent and being part of a generous vibrant artistic community that needed a place for exchange and dialogue, but I didn't think I needed training or permission or expertise. This does circumvent a hierarchical process in which one works ones way up a ladder or sees things in terms of power relations. This also influenced the programming in that very established artists presented along side unknowns. I was aware that the more known artists lent Cornershop a certain authority or gravitas but each event received the same attention and treatment. It also worked well with other art institutions in Buffalo, I could be quite responsive to situations and opportunities as I didn't have a calendar that was scheduled years in advance, and as I wasn't "official" in anyway I didn't have to adhere to rules other than the ones I made up. Thus Cornershop supported larger venues by filling in the cracks and being able to take risks and they returned the favour by co-sponsoring events and lending equipment. It must be said that Buffalo has a tradition of art and activism and this relationship I am describing was with the more artist oriented organisations and I had absolutely no connection with private galleries or the Albright Knox Museum.



Within the international art world a certain protocol exists. For all the creativity and change that surround contemporary art exhibitions there is an equal degree of stasis and sense of responsibility. One of the many paradoxes concerning art activity is the desire to be recognised for what you do and properly rewarded for it, which requires a degree of socio-economic stability, and the equal though opposing desire to challenge and overturn accepted modes of behaviour.

(Gillick, 1993:15)

Perhaps the institutions and the alternatives or oppositions are linked and actually need each other to define themselves. To be an alternative or an opposition one must recognise something to oppose or be alternative to.

Alternative organisations can offer large institutions a link to more risk taking ventures. Louise Short commenting on Stations' relationship to large art institutions in Bristol remarked, "We are in a loop. We are not in opposition; we need each other." The positive take on this is the sense that things can move into different spaces and that relationships are not locked into place. The negative take is that there is no way out.

Even oppositional identities can be—or, perhaps, always will be—harnessed to the larger systems of social production and reproduction. Indeed, one might argue that oppositionality itself is a constitutive and programmed part of social organization.

(Wallis, 2002: 177)

Artist run organisations in the late 60s and 70s in both the UK and the USA tended to be highly political and hold world-changing aspirations beyond reconstructions of the art system. This was concurrent with the civil rights, feminist, and anti-war movements.





The groups that did want to change the world (as opposed to merely claiming a place in it) were driven by a formidable sense of mission. In its service, they made some remarkably grandiose claims about the power of art to bring about social transformation.

(Goldbard, 2002: 187)

Much of the social transformation that occurred was in the art world itself.

Institutions took on the critiques of artists and began to integrate them and feature exhibitions, which focussed on social protest or a criticism of the power systems within the art world. In the 1960s it was radical to make art outside of the gallery and studio space, in the streets, within communities, but this is now a standard part of most art institutions' mission.

Artists have pricked the conscience of the art world, even if they failed to make much headway in the world at large.

(Goldbard, 2002: 188)

Markets, whether they are cultural or economic (of course intertwined), have shown that they can assimilate and absorb most oppositional content. Whether this flattens the opposition, deflates the transgression, or actually changes the "official culture" depends on the goals of the opposition and how one evaluates change. This all points to a much larger debate about social change and political systems than I can take on in the context of this discussion but I wanted to situate the political goals of artist run organisations within a consideration of the cycle and relationship of power. OMSK, Station, Taxi Gallery and Cornershop have no "grandiose claims to make about the power of art to bring about social transformation," but as I stated before they are all embedded with a political ideal. In their individual ways they focus on such ideas and methods



as collaboration, communal spaces, anti-authoritarian structures, and a "create your own world" mentality. Nicolas Bourriaud writes:

Art is modelling possible universes. Not creating utopias but actual models and ways of living... Social utopias and revolutionary hopes may have given way to everyday microtopias.

(Bourriaud, 2002: 13)

These projects focus on the small changes that can influence a limited amount of people who engage in encounters that these artists make possible through their commitment. Perhaps others are encouraged to model their own ideal both through positive experiences with these projects or with dissatisfaction - it doesn't matter which - as it is the idea that one can take control and intervene in the system of production which is important.

### The Temporary

In *The Practice of Every Day Life*, Michel De Certeau makes the following distinction between a strategy and a tactic:

A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (*propre*) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clienteles", "targets", or "objects" of research). Political, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed on this strategic model.

A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances.

(De Certeau, 1984: xix)



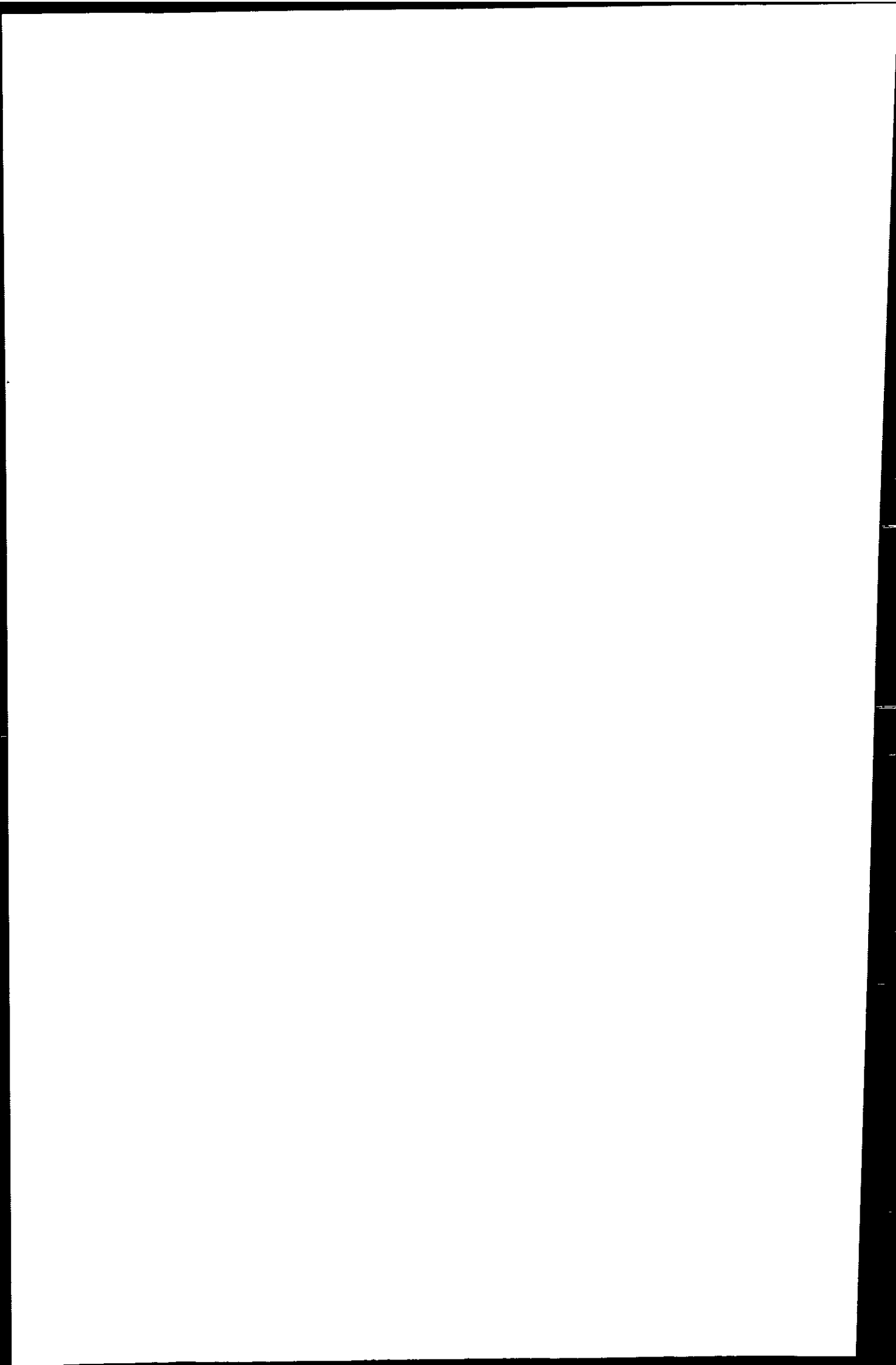
I always thought of Cornershop as something in-between the two: a tactical strategy or a tactical experience with a strategic location. It was tactical because it existed in borderlands between home, studio and gallery. It became Cornershop only on the nights it performed an event. It didn't matter if it was a poetry reading, a film and video screening, an art installation, a show of paintings, a fashion event, music, or a combination of all of the above: the opening was the show. Artists would install the show and be present at the event and everything would be about that social encounter. The whole thing would come down the next day or soon after and the shop became a studio space between events<sup>4</sup>.

It was tactical because it wasn't official in that it had no status as a non-profit or a business and, had anyone ever investigated it, probably would not have conformed to many health and safety codes. It never had a bank account or any base funding. I "insinuated" Cornershop onto other organizations by using their official status to help fund and advertise events but I didn't take on any of their identity.

It was strategic because it did have a set location from which I could establish relations and as I got better at running it I would create a schedule of events and produce four-month calendars. On the other hand I had no particular growth aspirations -I just wanted it to keep going as long as I felt like doing it

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<sup>4</sup> There was only one occasion when an artist requested to keep the show up for a set amount of time and I gave her keys so that she could show it by appointment.



and as long as it was fun. As it happened it ended because I left Buffalo to move to England, but I had already been thinking about stopping. I had no "final" event and made no attempt to find someone to take it over. I believed the energy and ideals would re-emerge in other propositions in Buffalo and that it was important to let Cornershop be a temporary happening rather than an institution. The other aspect of this decision was less political and less generous in that I felt troubled by the idea of giving it up to someone else when I had felt it was so intertwined with my own personality and aesthetics.

OMSK, Station, and Taxi Gallery have also invested in the ideal of the temporary with Station and OMSK having no clear idea of the duration of the endeavor and Taxi Gallery being set up as three-year project.

OMSK is the most obviously tactical as it has no set location at or in which it exists but is a nomadic event, which brands itself on to a place for a night, and then disappears only to reemerge somewhere new.

I've always enjoyed that sense that the audience has to seek us out and experience us anew. It was practically difficult because you are always building new relationships with people that run spaces and you're always having to find new ways of getting PAs and video projectors in and that was a pain but I certainly thought that if we had a regular building it might institutionalise us.

(Eastwood, 2005)

I wanted Cornershop to end before it became stale which I think is another common ideal among artist run initiatives. Sometimes when you get good at





something it can get boring and become formulaic. Or, the risks one took in the past become strategies in which one can predict the results.

Artists' initiatives are invariably high energy, they are intense and require full commitment. Inevitably there is burnout, ideas become stale, actions rote.

(Lawson as quoted in Goldbard, 2002: 192)

Taxi Gallery will end in September of 2005 and OMSK and Station are both possibly going to end, at least in their current form.

People should not run organisations for a long time. I can't keep living from Station so I need to pass it on so I can make a living. There are ways I could make money from Station but I don't want to replicate the gallery system.

(Short, 2005)

The idea of the temporary is as important as the idea of an extended duration – I'm interested in what will happen once Taxi Gallery is NOT HERE having BEEN HERE in terms of conversations and dialogues with its immediate neighbours – what might its absence generate? ... Three years is an extended duration and commitment compared to most site-specific art projects – this was also important to me though I never intended Taxi Gallery to be permanent.

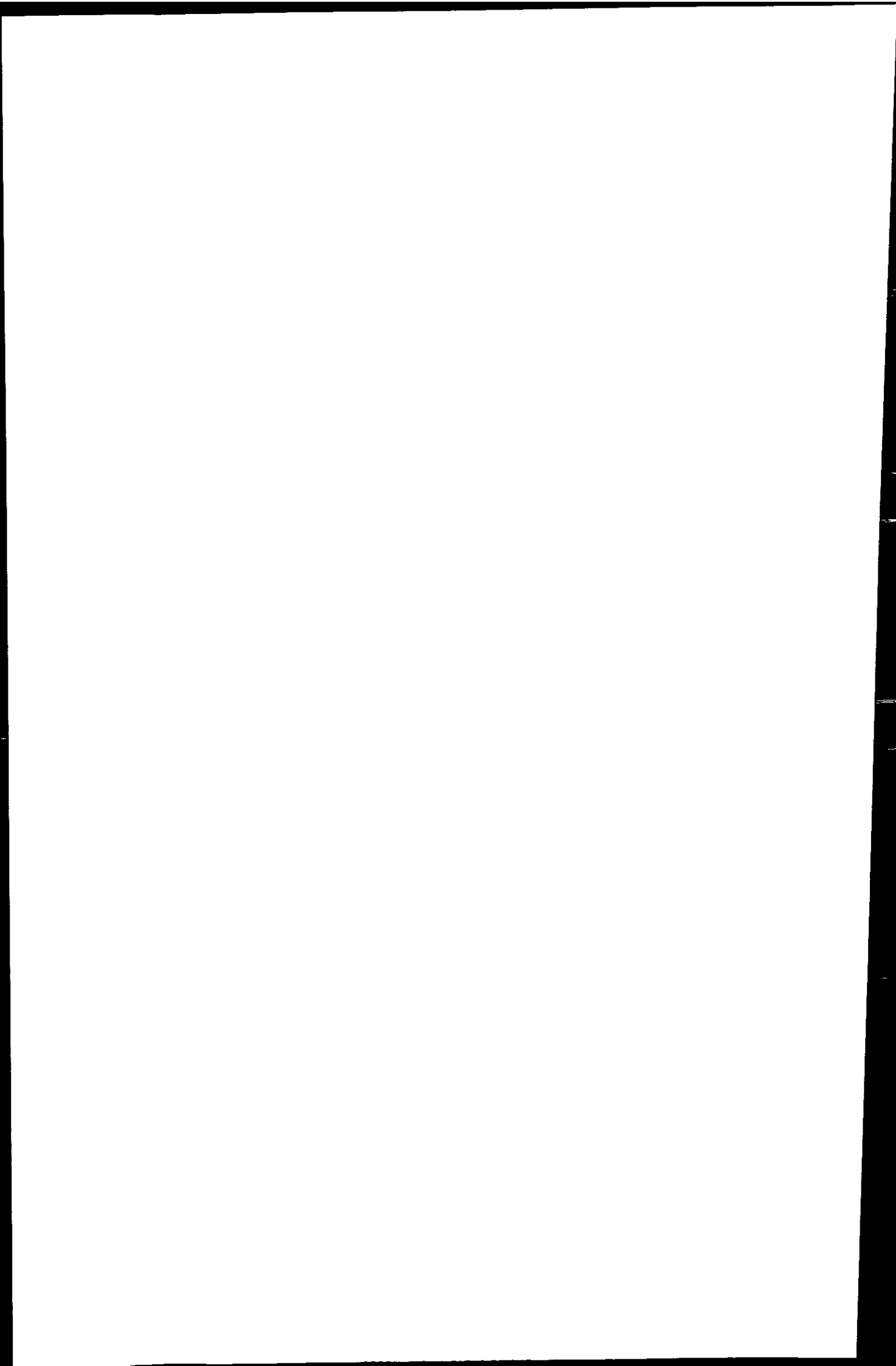
(Lavers, 2005)

I personally think that things must change which sounds like a truism but you can't keep doing the same thing. Even though the art was always different and the building was different I felt like the concept wasn't fresh for me any more and I think it is better to quit while you are ahead and I'd quite like to go out in a blaze.

(Eastwood, 2005)

## Funding

In the devotion to the temporary one can see the fear of becoming institutional, the establishment, or that which one was offering an alternative to in the first



place. The decision to seek and accept funding as an organisation has tremendous implications for an artist run organisation and while it obviously enables more ambitious undertakings it also can impose new unwanted structures and practices. Brian Wallis commenting upon a period in the US in the 70's when the National Endowment for the Arts began to fund artist run organisations writes:

Formerly autonomous artists were required, first, to see themselves as part of a professional class. In addition through the granting process, they were encouraged to give institutionally acceptable shape to their practices through the conventional managerial means of planning performance and accountability. For the first time, many artists had to explain what they were going to do before they did it, and then do it.  
(Wallis, 2002: 174)

Accountability and planning are not bad things in themselves but it can close off possibilities that occur through unknown, anarchic, disorganised creative methodologies, which cannot be made to conform to a corporate style of administration.

Cornershop was never officially funded through any kind of granting process. It was self-funded in the first several months with my own money and a pass-the-hat style of gathering money from the audience. Every event was donation only with a suggested amount of three dollars. There was a bar (well a table with an ice cooler under it) but it was never a profit-making venture. As time went on I did gain funding support from the University of Buffalo and by having other organisations that were publicly funded co-sponsor events but it was a casual undefined system, which involved no grant writing and was not admin heavy. As



I explained to Caroline Koebel when she asked me about how the funding evolved:

One day Charles Bernstein (a poet, critic and professor of English at SUNY Buffalo at the time) said, "Maybe, you should have some chairs." I said, "OK, cool!" So, the poetics program bought some chairs for Cornershop and that was the first big thing that happened: people didn't have to sit on the floor.

(Lewin, 2004)

I was never paid for the work but I wanted to pay the artists and not have to bear the operational costs of things like paint for the walls, stamps for the invitations, ink for my printer etc. Between the money from the Poetics Department and the co-sponsorship of other organisations this was achieved but it was never any type of contractual agreement.

I am of a generation of American artists who began practicing during the Reagan and Bush Sr. era. Arts funding was cut severely and many artist organisations that were dependent on public funding folded. I had no sense of public funding opportunities and felt strongly that Cornershop had to be self-sufficient. About a year and a half into it I looked into becoming a not for profit organization so I could apply for grants but quickly decided against it when I realised the amount of paperwork involved. All the other projects I have been discussing are based in England and have had support from different public funding bodies. There is more of a culture of public funding for art in England so this is not surprising. Steven Eastwood and Louise Short expressed a sense of ambiguity in measuring the consequences of public funding against the



possibilities it allowed.

I think all of the events that were publicly funded were not as good as the ones that weren't and that's a very interesting thing. I think artists within the collective that had been funded to make work for an OMSK event felt an added pressure or an expectation on what they were producing and because of the ambition of each event it never meant that that money was that substantial for any artist so it wasn't as if they could go off and make a big piece and bring it back, they were working with limited means. So it somehow felt as some of the funded events lost some of the DIY character maybe or some of the emergent qualities. Essentially we have always wanted OMSK to be a testing ground: its much more about trying something than bringing something that is resolved and if you've got funding you kind of feel like you should bring something that is finished. It meant that we could pay people to do our sound and to pay people to do our technical stuff and that helped.

(Eastwood, 2005)

Well I must say I don't burden the artists with the issues and the Arts Council wants to know the real specifics of the actual event but because I've just come to the end of the financial year I'm having to write documents and talk about figures and numbers of people, what age group, what ethnic origin, things like that which before I didn't. You know it didn't seem to be that necessary or relevant...We have to think about how government agendas filter through the Arts Council to artist led spaces. It's a problem if people start making "worthy" art. Artists are forced to lie about what they did - counting numbers etc.

(Short, 2005)

Kirsten Lavers received funding for Taxi Gallery as an individual artist, which coalesces with her statement that Taxi Gallery is her artistic practice. Although she comments on the administrative burden she does not feel this was added to by receiving funding.

The first 9 months was self-funded - since then I've had two Arts Council grants and certain projects have been supported by Awards for All funding sought by the organisation I've worked with (schools) - I've always applied as an individual and positioned Taxi Gallery as an art project thus the funding has not implicated me in any further admin than would normally be required from a solo artist - Taxi Gallery is a very





admin heavy project though...That's something I shan't miss - hard to find creative satisfaction in admin.

(Lavers, 2005)

Artists end up playing a balancing act in which they try and stay true to their ideals and ways of operating while learning the rules of the funding game and being accountable. In the best case scenario this would benefit both; funding agencies would try to understand the ethos of artist run spaces and adapt their forms and ways of understanding processes while artists would be sure to produce more ambitious operations.

### Re-activating Space

Space now is not just where things happen; things make space happen.  
(O'Doherty, 2000: 18)

It is old news that artists are often the first step to the gentrification of a neighbourhood. They move into run down areas looking for cheap rent and space. Cafes and shops start cropping up, more people move there, rents go up and the cycle usually ends a decade or so later when artists and locals are priced out of the area. But artists often do have an eye and an economic need to be creative about uses of space and all the projects I have been writing about rely on reactivating or recreating the use of spaces. Cornershop was a boarded up old corner store, which hadn't been used as a public space in twenty years. Taxi Gallery consists of a "mechanically defunct but otherwise practically pristine" (Lavers, 2004) London Black Cab. Station was an old fireboat station in need of renovation. OMSK temporarily transforms a multitude of places from



railway arches, old banks, pubs, warehouses, even whole streets into OMSK spaces. Again I'll refer to de Certeau:

In relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is when it is caught in the ambiguity of actualisation transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions situated as a act of the present (or a time) and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocality or stability of a "proper."

(de Certeau, 1984: 117)

In other words spaces are created through an engagement and use of places. A space is created in the moment, in the speaking it becomes something, which can immediately change, evolve, and mutate into something else. It is the how and who and what and why which makes a space work. Of course architecture makes a difference, the design of space and how people travel through it, but it is not necessary to have an eight million pound building to create a space for things to happen. In fact sometimes this can be a burden, which brings an organisation down. But again I am not interested in creating a simple opposition in which dilapidated space, which is reactivated, is creative and new expensive buildings represent the evil institution. There are successes and failures in both cases but all the artist initiatives I am writing about have operated on low funds and a creative engagement with space has been an important element of their success.

Creating an art space is also about interacting with audience and artists. Station, OMSK, Cornershop, and Taxi Gallery all place an emphasis on bridging the



gap between artist and audience and making an arena for dialogue. In all of the projects the audience seem to be as important as the artists while at the same time avoiding missionary type zeal of "bringing art to the people." When I was building up Cornershop I was very aware of my neighbourhood but I didn't try to pressure people into coming to events. On the opening night of Cornershop I made sure to invite Guido, the old man two houses down, who had described Cornershop's layout when it was an actual store. He didn't show up and the next day I asked him why. He told me "I saw all those people and I felt ashamed." I was saddened by his answer but my response was not to create any specific plan to break down people's boundaries but to keep Cornershop casual and open. My biggest concern was that it didn't bother those who lived close by and no one ever complained about the way it would spill out onto the sidewalk in the warmer months, or of noise, or odd goings on. One neighbour said it improved the "status" of the street to have a gallery but she rarely came to events. A few people in the area did come regularly - Grace and Mark who lived in the other half of the house, Mary the pernickety older woman who lived next door, and the local semi-transvestite (whose name I forget) and who couldn't believe it when he saw men in dresses running around in Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*. His response was "That sure is weird" ... Guido did come to a few events, mostly I think, to sneak a beer, which he wasn't allowed at home, but the audience was chiefly people who were looking for an encounter with art and that seemed fine to me.



Taxi Gallery is also in a residential area with no other art venues nearby.

Neighbourhood involvement was very important to Lavers but,

its been the most elusive and tricky thing to draw out, – now that I've announced the end of Taxi Gallery suddenly I'm getting a great deal of feedback from people – telling me how much they've enjoyed Taxi Gallery and how much they will miss it.

And although the contact with those in the immediate vicinity has been important she also insists:

Taxi Gallery is not a community art project; it was not and is not setting out to educate, inspire or incorporate my neighbours into art connoisseurs, critics or even artists nor does it dare to presume to be usefully addressing the very real social issues that they face in their day to day lives.

(Lavers, 2004: 8)

Station has capitalized on its public location on the Bristol docks. The door stays open whether the show is in process or installed and there is someone there to speak to people who wander in.

There are huge summer day audiences of people on the docks. On open door day (run by the architecture council) 2000 people came to see the tunnel.<sup>5</sup>

But again she is not interested in an evangelical approach or the dumbing down of art:

Audiences come because there is good work. It's word of mouth, which gets an audience more than marketing and advertising.

(Short, 2005)

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<sup>5</sup> Louise Short Heath Bunting and Kayle Brandon excavated a historic tunnel under Station in 2003.





OMSK has a diverse audience and concentrates on promoting interdisciplinarity and levelling the relationship between audience and artist.

The thing that is great about the format of OMSK is that you will get people that are interested in perhaps electronic avant-garde music and then they will experience video or live art concerned with the body whereas if they had just gone to a sound gig at the ICA they wouldn't have had that. Independent filmmakers that are probably pretty much absorbed in film and wouldn't be going to the Live Art review would come to an OMSK event and see live art... I think quite a lot of people saw it as like going to the carnival where they could stay out late and have something extraordinary hopefully to tell their friends about the next day.

(Eastwood, 2005)

While there is a commonality in an interest in shaping an environment there is quite a variety in the approach, and participating in any of these projects, either as an artist or as audience, would not be particularly similar. This is a good thing. I had the opportunity of exhibiting as an artist in both OMSK and Taxi Gallery and enjoyed participating as an artist<sup>6</sup> and only being concerned with my contribution. I put my work under others' banners and having had experience of being on the other side of the equation was aware of how much work was happening on their side. Both were quality experiences with a very different feel to them. In OMSK I was part of a large event (*Room, Not in a Day*) in which OMSK took over Geffrye Street in East London and I, much as Steven described, did not feel elevated as the artist but felt part of a happening. I took it as an opportunity to take a risk, go with the flow of OMSK, and try out something new. I brought out the Bear again and did a live performance called *The Bear does Carolee*, a re-enactment of Carolee Schneemann's *Interior Scroll*

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<sup>6</sup> Please see the DVD for Chapter 4 to view these works.



in which I pulled out the bear's innards/stuffing/scroll in the middle of the Geffrye Museum's Gardens. The audience was threefold; those who had come for the OMSK event and probably recognised the reference to Schneemann; those who happened to be walking through the garden; and people working in the museum café overlooking the garden. Whether they thought it was art or just something wacky, no one seemed to mind, as the performance was 40 minutes long, no permission had been asked for, and no one stopped it. For me it was a rare buzz of doing something live, not encased in an installation or more for a camera to be reconstructed later.

The Taxi Gallery was a more individual experience in which I felt the attention was upon me, and so felt a self-imposed pressure to make sure I could carry the situation. As I wasn't working in residence I decided to focus on the Taxi itself as the site for the project rather than engaging with the neighbourhood or domestic placement of the Taxi. I felt sure that Kirsten was doing that and recognised Taxi Gallery as a shared project. I imagined the Taxi as a gangster's getaway car that couldn't get away and created a film noir video installation, using sound from three famous film noirs mixed with my own slapstick footage, and let death roll over and over. Again the audience was diverse with those in the area or people walking by, a more general art audience, and later those who visit Taxi Gallery's extensive website. The most interesting feedback I received was from a little girl who sat watching the video in the blacked out cab with her parents. She emerged angry that her parents had laughed through much of the video -



death, she thought, was a serious subject.

Both OMSK and Taxi gallery gave me that valuable opportunity to discuss the work I made with the audience who came to view it.

### Why Do It?

The largest commonality between all these artists is the tremendous amount of time and commitment it takes to sustain projects like these. If you have run a successful artist run initiative it is possible that you will later receive kudos or gain new opportunities but no one in their right mind would enter into a long term artist run initiative as a planned career move. As Becky Shaw comments:

It's a strange idea that to go up some ladder as an artist you act as a curator – the best way to go up any ladder as an artist is to probably be an artist.

(Shaw as quoted in Claxton 2005: 8)

And it's not often economically rewarding – unless you are making a move to insert yourself in the art market. So what is the motivation? Probably a combination of the many things I have been discussing – political beliefs, creating the environment you want art to be encountered in, a social need, making a space for things that don't fit in and lastly and possibly most importantly it just takes a certain personality and drive. It's something that can't really be quantified or defined.

In Julie Ault's introduction to Artist Group 80's NY she writes:

What becomes history is to some degree determined by what is



archived...It is critical to establish written histories of meaningful situations and processes challenged the status quo of the art system - to conserve them, to move them from memory and inscribe them, and to supply analysis of their economic and political contexts as well as strategies to be modified and improved upon.

(Ault, 2002: 3)

It was reading this that motivated me to construct a public archive of Cornershop. ([www.yesandnu.com/cornershop](http://www.yesandnu.com/cornershop)) The Internet has allowed for a more accessible public voice and by constructing a public archive I have created a place that those who were involved in making Cornershop happen can revisit and which anyone who might be interested in artist run initiatives, or art happenings in Buffalo, or a certain artist, can use it as a research tool. Again I haven't waited for someone to write Cornershop into a historical narrative but have done it myself.

In writing this essay I have chosen to contextualise Cornershop with the activities of three other artist run initiatives. By looking at the workings and politics of each of them it has helped me to reflect back onto Cornershop and understand its place in a wider web of activity. It is often the case that while inside a situation, especially one with a "just make it happen" ethos, one can't reflect as much upon the ideologies and particularities which construct the everyday. In hindsight, I recognise Cornershop as part of a long history of artists rejecting an art world in which they are powerless and inventing situations in which they can construct their own models.





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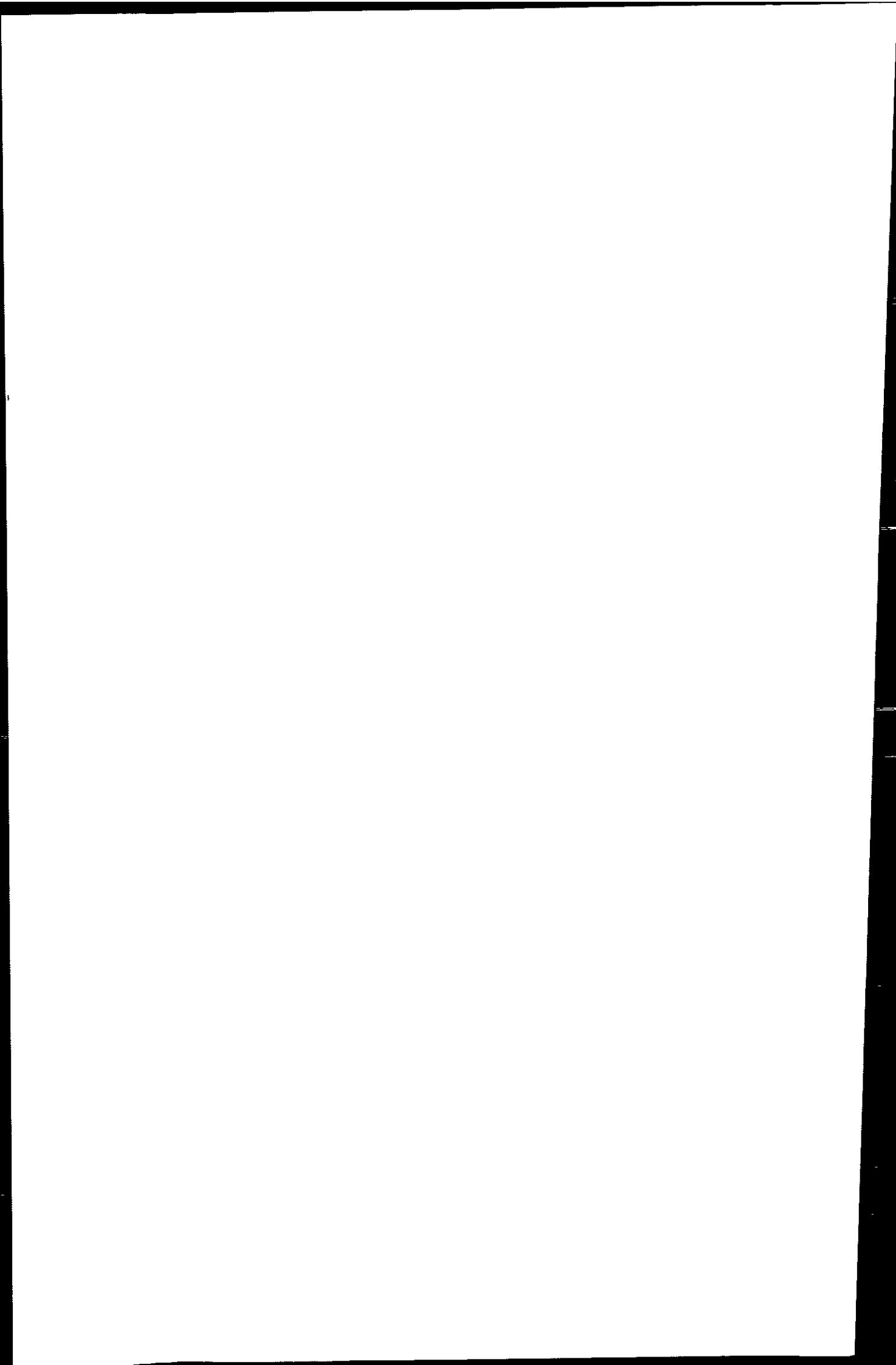
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## Conclusion

The first chapter of this PhD document concentrates on mis-translation as a creative form of constructing narrative and exposing multiplicities. It argues that the failure to wholly cross from one language to another allows for a fuller experience for the viewer, for the possibility to recognise the experience of translation. This idea of the mis-step, of what emerges from impossible situations, carries through to the following chapters so that the suggestion of (mis)translation can be read throughout. In the costumed performances success and failure happens in the same image, in the same moment, and so constructs something new. In art that is placed in the space of advertising does some translation happen between the context and the content? Does a space that sells products become a space that invites other kinds of desires? When artists run exhibition spaces as extensions of their own artistic practice do they dictate the terms of the exchange of art or do they merge with a larger system of art and commerce? I am interested in the in-between spaces that emerge in hiccups and stutters.

Engaging in this PhD study has given me the opportunity to have an overview of my own practice. I am now able to recognise that although my practice is eclectic, I do have a methodology or similarity of approach across all the work discussed as well as the PhD itself. I tend to approach an area of interest with loose ideas and images and produce material in an improvisational manner. I don't have a deterministic approach to the work, a vision of what the end piece



will look like, but find it through experimentation and an editorial and construction process. I do not try to control all the parameters of the situation but to respond and also to understand that complete control is impossible and for me an undesirable outcome. It is the unknown that is a motivational factor. I think through making the work and reflect back on it through a research process.

I do not tend to be medium driven although I work a lot with video, which is a reflection of my early film and video training, but I pick up on a medium when I need it. I am interested in a convergence of different forms and how new technologies allow for a flow of media. Audience and of what purpose art is for is a concern in all the work I make although I find it an unanswerable question. I would like to pursue different methods of dissemination made possible through new technological platforms such as mobile phones and streaming technologies and imagine this to be the direction of future work. But it is clear to me that I am not an artist who is interested in being a specialist or having a clear expertise. I value the opportunities to roam through different territories, while trying to do so with sensitivity and a rigorous approach. McKenzie Wark writes:

A tactical knowledge borrows from area studies without being caught within its territorial prerogatives.

(Wark, McKenzie)

This seems a good model for a contemporary arts practice that is situational and responsive, while being researched based. The ideal of the tactical artist has been adopted by some media artists and arises from Michel De Certeau's





discussion of tactics and strategies, which I referred to in Chapter 4. Critical Art

Ensemble lay out five main principles of tactical media:

specificity (deriving content and choosing media based on the specific needs of a given audience within their everyday life context); nomadicality (a willingness to address any situation and to move to any site); amateurism (a willingness to try anything, or negatively put, to resist specialization); deterritorialization (an occupation of space that is predicated upon its surrender, or anti-monumentalism); and counterinduction (a recognition that all knowledge systems have limits and internal contradictions, and that all knowledge systems can have explanatory power in the right context, and that contradiction in general is productive).

(CAE interview with Ryan Griffis)

I like these principles as they allow for concentrated work on particular projects while encouraging a flow of devising work in different situations. In today's academic and commercial art environment it can be difficult to resist clearly defining one's speciality, genre, type of work or area of study. It often places one outside of opportunities that need clear definition but it is a political position to place yourself as open to amateurism, and also one that allows for a constant questioning, the sense of knowledge as an ability to not know and the drive to continue discovering without closing down ideas. Marcel Duchamp, the ultimate art trickster wrote "my position is the lack of any position". When an artist enters into a situation without any clear position it allows her to get underneath the various strands of thoughts and explanations, and creates an environment in which things can just happen. As Duchamp explains it is a position, or in the language I have been referring to a tactic. It is this that I will take forward with me into my future work.



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## Appendix A

Dear People of the World,

My name is Redas Dirzys and I am an artist, and the head of the Art School in the small town of Alytus of the small country Lithuania. First, I want to announce worldwide more than just the fact of attempts of the local authorities to close the art school. The major thing I want to call your attention to is the license, arrogance and cynicism of the functionaries, that you're noticing around yourself too, and the mechanisms they are using to highlight their power. This is not a fear of losing my job; please don't treat it as a desperate attempt to ask for a support of the school.

The story is very simple: local authorities decided to close perfectly functioning schools for visual arts and for musical education and to join them to the training school for folk crafts. The whole unit they decided to call the Artistic Training Center. The basic thing of the whole reorganization is the appearance of the classical bureaucratic pyramid, all under this mechanically made unit, with the main task to properly administrate these bastard artists.

The official motivations for this step is: better coordination of the joint events of these three former institutions (common participation in city or the state or international celebrations and projects) and better opportunity to get bigger money from European foundations. The step is warranted on the thesis that there



is not such kind of infrastructure of the State Art Schools in the countries of EU, even they are trying to prove that the EU officials are insisting not to support this kind of schools from the state money and the mostly funny argument is: there is not such a kind of schools in Denmark (Danish educational system is the standard for the Lithuanian educational system to be turned into. 10 years ago Danish experts were the first to come to Lithuania with the money of European foundations to ensure the way of Danish educational system to be taken as an example).

The methods: the chief of city educational department issued the order for the heads of the schools to prepare the documentation for the reorganization of their institutions to look as they are asking for those themselves. I gave everything to the press what already means in this former soviet country that I have no chance to win that fight (anyway I've already refused from the same amount of salary in a new planned Artistic Training Center). So, I am turning all that activity to a biggest social performance I ever did – to play the game till the end with the full spread of imagination.

I am inviting everybody to react to the fact in the way they find out convenient for themselves by writing the letters from abroad – to let the authorities of the small city of the small country to be seen from a wider prospective, or to propose them some much spectacular way to deal with the artistic education. Anyway they are asking now for another alternative ways what to do with the





artistic education?

Please use the following email addresses to send the letters: info@ana.lt and saule@ana.lt . The addresses are from the local main daily of Alytus city and for a whole south Lithuanian region Alytaus Naujienos (Alytus News) – the most influential for the region who have also kindly agreed to work for that.

Sincerely,

Redas Dirzys redas\_dirzys@yahoo.com  
The head of Alytus Art School (still)

Please cc letters to redas\_dirzys@yahoo.com and anya.lewin@btinternet.com

#### Some of the Letters of Support

From: anya lewin <anya.lewin@btinternet.com>  
Date: Tue, 25 May 2004 10:40:55 +0100  
To: <info@ana.lt>, <saule@ana.lt>  
Subject: Don't Close Alytus Dailies Mokykla!!!

To the People of Alytus, Lithuania:

My name is Anya Lewin and I am an artist and a Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at The University of Plymouth in England. I am writing to say how saddened and dismayed I am to hear of the possible closing of Alytus Dailies Mokykla.

In April 2003, I, along with Steven Eastwood (Assistant Professor of Film, University of Buffalo, USA) came to visit the school and to make a film about the



experience. We were incredibly impressed with the calibre of the students and the teachers at the school. I understand a very high percentage of the students go on to attend university, which is of little surprise to me, as the students were so obviously engaged in the educational process.. The school was run incredibly well yet had an atmosphere that encouraged creativity and intellectual development. It was refreshing to see an institution of art run by an actual artist who understood the processes being taught. We both felt that art schools in England and the USA could benefit from an exchange of ideas with the Alytus Dailies Mokykla. We have been hoping to create some kind of exchange programme.

The visit resulted in a 30 minute film called "Different Systems of Chaos". This film has been shown in: New York City, NY; Buffalo, NY; Los Angeles, CA; Palm Springs, CA; London, UK; Exeter, UK; Totnes, UK; Liverpool, UK, an Amsterdam, Netherlands. It is still circulating and will be screened in many international venues. Each time it has been shown it has been very well received and people are very interested and impressed with the school. The film generates excellent conversation and also people feel very passionate about what a contemporary arts education can give as a foundation to a young student.

Please do not close the Alytus Dailies Mokykla. It is a national gem and an important asset to the town of Alytus.



Sincerely,  
Anya Lewin

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Anya Lewin  
Senior Lecturer in Fine Art  
University of Plymouth  
<http://www.plym.ac.uk/>

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From: Charles Bernstein <[charles.bernstein@english.upenn.edu](mailto:charles.bernstein@english.upenn.edu)>  
Date: Wed, 02 Jun 2004 20:45:29 -0400  
To: [info@ana.ltm](mailto:info@ana.ltm), [saule@ana.lt](mailto:saule@ana.lt)  
Cc: [redas\\_dirzys@yahoo.com](mailto:redas_dirzys@yahoo.com)

The plight of the Alytus Art School has been brought to my attention. A successful art school is now being compromised to create greater uniformity of education. In so doing, the possibility for a thriving arts community is also compromised, along with the enormous intellectual and creative contribution that the arts bring to cultures in which they are allowed to thrive, undeterred by central planning and regimentation. A great culture needs great art and great art needs place like Alytus Arts School to give art a chance. I hope this regrettable decision can be changed.

Sincerely,  
Charles Bernstein  
Poet - Critic -  
Professor of English  
University of Pennsylvania  
USA

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From: "Martin ZET" <[m.zet@volny.cz](mailto:m.zet@volny.cz)>  
Date: Wed, 2 Jun 2004 21:56:33 +0200  
To: <[anya.lewin@btinternet.com](mailto:anya.lewin@btinternet.com)>  
Subject: zcca SUPPORT



## LIBUSIN SUPPORT FOR LITHUANIAN ART SCHOOL SYSTEM

Open letter to Lithuanian Public and those responsible

Dear cultural people,

Dear people from culture,

Dear people responsible for cultural education,

Some of high representatives of the ZCCA-Libusin had the privilege to visit and see the Alytus Art school and were fascinated by surprisingly high standard of education, which this school as representative of this kind of schools offers. I personally after my return back home tried to speak with responsible people about this model of art education, which doesn't exist in Czech Republic as about the extremely challenging and effective one. I was dreaming about that this type of school should be installed also in the Czech Republic.

I was shocked when I heard that one of the best things I admired in Lithuania is now in troubles.

LET'S SUPPORT THE ALYTUS ART SCHOOL!

LET'S SUPPORT THE LITHUANIAN ART SCHOOL SYSTEM!

LET'S HELP TO MAINTAIN THE BETTER FUNCTIONING INVENTIONS!

LET'S ON THE OTHER HAND TRY TO EXPOT THEM TO FELLOW EUROPEAN COUNTRIES!

LET'S ON THE OTHER HAND TRY TO EXPOT THEM TO THE WHOLE WORLD!





Yours sincerely,

Martin Zet  
ZCCA-Libu%oin,  
P.O.BOX 21  
273 06 Libu%oin  
Czech Republic

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From: Norma Cohen <mailto:n.cohen@blueyonder.co.uk>  
To: saule@ana.lt  
Sent: Saturday, May 29, 2004 7:28 PM  
Subject: Alytus Art School

Dear Editor,

I recently visited Lithuania on a British Embassy/Arts Council funded research trip. I would like to voice my protest at the proposed closure of Alytus Art School as it seems to me that Head of School Redas Dirzys is doing a fantastic job already in terms of education and creativity.

I hope my letter will help persuade the authorities to change their mind and let him continue his excellent, important work.

Yours sincerely,

Norma Cohen, London

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From: Geoff Cox <gcox@plymouth.ac.uk>  
Date: Mon, 31 May 2004 22:11:18 +0100  
To: <info@ana.lt>, <saule@ana.lt>  
Cc: <redas\_dirzys@yahoo.com>, <anya.lewin@btinternet.com>  
Subject: Alytus art school



I am writing to lend my support to Redas Dirzys and the art school he runs, and to question the decision to 'reorganise' it. I know about the school from watching the excellent documentary 'Different Systems of Chaos' by Steve Eastwood and Anya Lewin, made after a visit in 2003.

The film depicts a critically-aware and creative environment that serves as a model of good pedagogy in the arts through active participation and irony - something lacking in the UK at least that is driven almost entirely by economic imperatives at the expense of quality or student experience.

Adorno and Horkheimer said it all:

'Interested parties explain the culture industry in technological terms. [...] The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger. No mention is made of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is the greatest. A technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself'.  
(from, The Culture Industry)

Yours,  
Geoff Cox  
i-DAT  
Institute of Digital Art and Technology  
School of Computing, Communications and Electronics,  
University of Plymouth, Portland Square, Plymouth, PL4 8AA, Devon, UK.  
T: ++44-01752-232541  
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E: gc@i-dat.org  
W: <http://www.i-dat.org>  
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From: Robert Creeley <creeley@acsu.buffalo.edu>  
Date: Fri, 28 May 2004 15:16:02 -0400  
To: info@ana.lt, saule@ana.lt  
Subject: A moment of your time



Dear Sir or Madam,

I am sorry indeed to learn that generalizing state administrative interests will overwrite the extraordinary work which Redas Dirzys has done in his directorship of the Art School of Alytus in Lithuania. Not long ago I was able to see a film made and produced by visiting film makers Steven Eastwood and Anya Lewin from England. Its title was Different Systems of Chaos, an impressive recognition of the exceptional perception of creative order and artistic foundation, which Redas Dirzys was able to sponsor, despite the seeming isolation of the school and the modest resources given it to work with. Art not only thrives but depends on such sensitive and active rapport with its needs as was evident. It cannot be made to work for a third party or be convenient simply to preordained ends in view. Here in the United States, one of our most eminent critics, the Harvard professor Helen Vendler, in her NEH Jefferson Lecture on the humanities given this month in Washington, notes aptly:

...The arts bring into play historical and philosophical questions without implying the prevalence of a single system or of universal solutions. Artworks embody the individuality that fades into insignificance in the massive canvas of history and is suppressed in philosophy by the desire for impersonal assertion. The arts are true to the way we are and were, to the way we actually live and have lived—as singular persons swept by drives and affections, not as collective entities or sociologica paradigms.

Especially in such times as our two countries have had to find lives in, it is immensely important that capabilities and inherent gifts such as those of Dr. Dirzys and his students be respected and nurtured. To have a world simply "cut



to order" will prove only a sad return to that most limiting and destructive human condition we have, so one had hoped, all too recently survived.

Sincerely,

Robert Creeley

Distinguished Professor of English, Brown University

Mem. American Academy of Arts and Sciences

Mem. American Academy of Arts and Letters

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PO Box 2584, Providence, RI 02906

\* Email: Robert\_Creeley@brown.edu

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Steven Eastwood

Assistant Professor, Film

University at Buffalo

The State University of New York

231 Center for the Arts

Buffalo

NY 14260-6020

email: paradogs@pinkpink.demon.co.uk

June 3, 2004

F.A.O. Alytus News

re: the threatened closure of Alytus Art School (Alytus Dailies Mokykla)

My name is Steven Eastwood. I am an independent filmmaker and Assistant

Professor in Film at Buffalo University. A little over a year ago Anya Lewin and

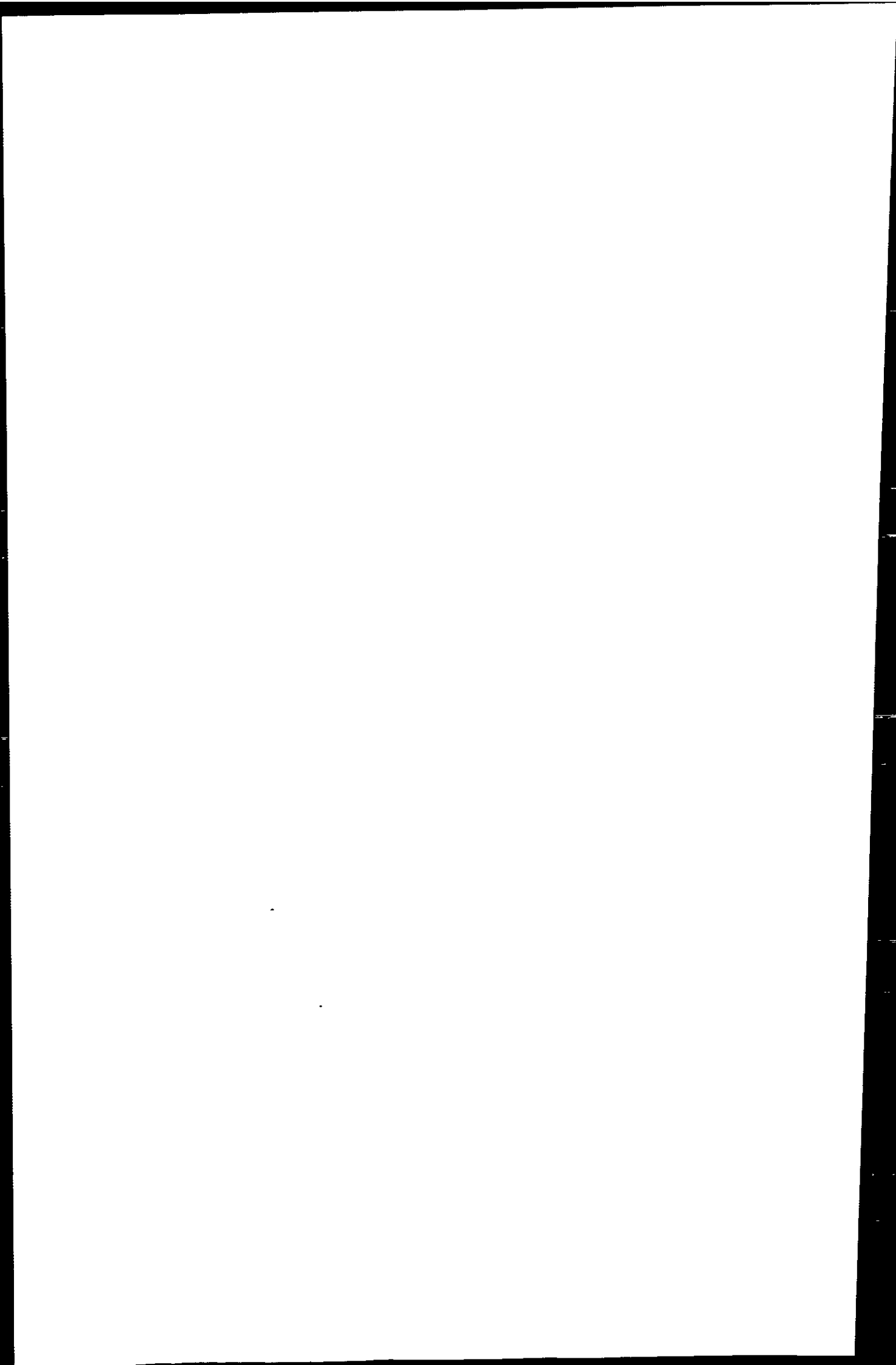
myself had the great pleasure of visiting Alytus Dailies Mokykla to collaborate

with Redas Dirzys (The School Director), and with the teachers and students of

the school. Together we made a film called 'Different Systems of Chaos'. It was

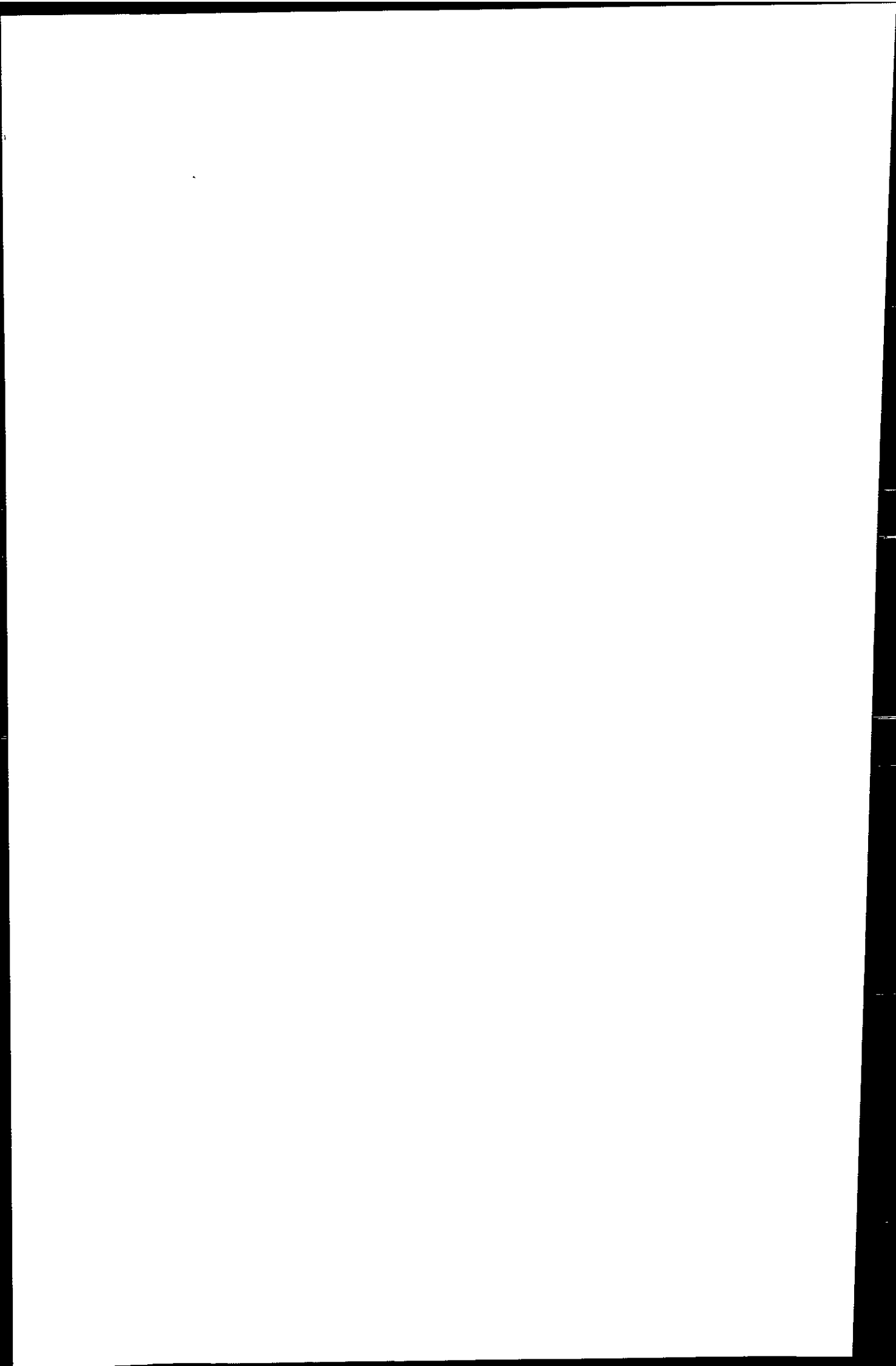
our intention to somehow reflect the exceptional educational environment within





the school, and to articulate how necessary it is that (rare) places of learning such as this must not be compromised, or worse closed, as a result of bureaucratic state agency. The film has played in Lithuania, and to audiences in the UK and US, with tremendously positive feedback. Many people have commented on this extraordinary school, and the clearly evident spirit of its staff and students. And now I find that the school is threatened with closure...

I have worked in arts education for close to ten year, and have tried in my teaching to create a situation where people can feel excited and empowered by learning and by making art. There are many institutional and governmental pressures that make this difficult at times. What Redas Dirzys has built at Alytus Dailies Mokykla is an inspiration to any educator. Redas is that rare type of artist who is able to synthesise his practise and his academic duties. His style and the system of education he has adeptly evolved are both inclusive and insightful. The school is one team: staff and students. Over the four days of the shoot I noticed how creatively motivated and involved all of the students were and how capable they were of grasping complex ideas. The staff presented broad curricular material, but they did much more than this. They made art and the classroom alive. This is why so many students opt to voluntarily spend time in the school outside of lessons. They recognise that this is community where thinking and making is theirs. The school is a testament to how an institution can be about accessing ideas and acquiring creative, intellectual and social skills, happily and dialectically.



Alytus Dailies Mokykla is an inspiration. It is the kind of school I wish I could have attended as a teenager. It is unacceptable that the school should close. The impact of this would be felt on the community within and around the town, and, through its example and the excellent progression of graduating students, would also be felt nationally. I oppose its closure unequivocally and urge the local authority to rescind its plans immediately.

Yours faithfully,  
Steven Eastwood

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From: "Adina Bar-On" <adina\_baron@hotmail.com>  
Date: Sun, 06 Jun 2004 21:29:10 +0300  
To: info@ana.lt, saule@ana.lt, redas\_dirzys@yahoo.com,  
adina\_baron@hotmail.com  
Subject: reflections on Education by a colleague of a Redas Dirzys

To whom this may concern,

I am a Visual Artist, working and residing in Tel Aviv. I teach Visual Communication and Sound at Bezalel Academy in Jerusalem and at Kamera Obskura School of Art in Tel Aviv.

"Reflections about EDUCATION"

This is pertaining to a mission that I have in common with Redas Dirzys.



This morning, standing in front of a class, I asked my students if they thought there is any advantage in representing diverse "points of view" in a work of Art... ? - We had, in actuality, been discussing Culture in the 20th and 21st Centuries and so, having received a response of quiet, I proceeded with another question: And - Culture? I asked more explicitly, Does "Culture" have 1 point of view in society today? This was, apparently, an easier question to tackle and these are some of the ideas that that had evolved in our discussion:

1) "Culture" was defined as a manifestation of aspirations and longings in the visual, in the plastic and in sound and, more precisely, as means to defining physically that which is mental in us.

2) The sensual forms, of plastic and sound media, are not linear and therefore any individual will be receptive to these media as a relatively subjective experience.

3) The artist, in the process of creating, perceives his own work as a receptor, as well, and thus might evolve diverse points of view within his work.

4) A work of Art that presents or represents more than one point of view will permit the onlooker, namely the individual in the audience, to participate by projecting his/her point of view and thus becoming an involved participant in the discussion.



It has become my notion that the option to conduct exchanges of thoughts and feelings between persons with different manners of expression is more beneficial than an exchange between people with the similar comprehensions. An open agenda to various languages and, therefore, exchange of points of view enables the individual to regain their right to a definition of his/her own life.

Adina Bar-On

56 Allenby Rd.  
Tel Aviv, Israel

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Sveiki,

I write this email on an urge from Redas Dirzys, head of Alytaus Dailes Mokykla and Anya Lewin's email to Live Art web exchange. (I do speak Lithuanian but will write in English as I am not born in Lithuania).

It is of great importance that Art schools avoid any corporate restructuring. The specificity of Alytaus Art School must be retained, not only because of its plea but also in the wider context of culture, creativity and energy which seems to emanate from Dr. Dirzys and his teaching staff. In art education 'mergers' are not a matter which needs to be addressed for any higher good.





This is a letter of emphatic support to avoid the reorganization of Alytaus Dailes Mokykla. It is of great importance that an art school is allowed to remain autonomous and therefore work in an environment which does not create the additional bureaucratic strains on itself. Small cities such as Alytai are environments which are the gems and regardless of its size should be retained in its present structure.

Yours sincerely,

Kristina Kotov(aite) Architect, Artist, Filmmaker  
-3rd Year Studio Tutor  
Interior and Spatial Design/  
-Course Tutor  
MADE- Master of Arts- Design for the Environment  
Chelsea College of Art and Design  
The University of the Arts London

ps I write this without experience of visiting Alytaus Dailes Mokykla, but I trust the plea.

#### Letter of Thanks To All the People Who Had Supported Alytus Art School's Fight against Bureaucratic Treatment

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the whole community of the Art School I would like to say huge thanks to everybody who thought about the problem, shared with your thoughts, wrote the letters of support, protest or those with the arguments why artistic education we need at all or clearly describing what already happen in different



places of the world after the similar intervention of skillfully economically trained bureaucrats into the field of artistic education and what were the results and so on. As I've had initially informed all of you all the texts written by you were translated and published in the local newspaper Alytaus Naujienos (Alytus News). Because of the difficulties with translation the texts were published with some one-two weeks delay during the whole June. The situation was quite unprecedented – there are not so many articles published in a local newspaper which are about some cultural, art life at all and there never happens any discussion on that. Usually some episodes from political and economical life appear criminal chronicle and that's it. So, the publishing of the texts created unreal situation for the whole town, which sometimes slightly even linked to be a sort kind media circus...

But did anything really happen? The fact is that the plans to make the reorganization are postponed to the future without any clarified dates. The authorities just at the very beginning were trying to accuse art School's side as having no any economical arguments to withstand to their plans (sic!) Another much more cynical attitude was formulated to follow the first one: the viewpoint of the State ministries or that from national art world and art educational system are not interested local authorities anymore, because the school is municipal and they can do whatever they want...but all the campaign with the letters seemed to be quite unexpected and very irritating. They decided not to play the game (politically it was not the right time: there were president elections in June



and all the parties are already working from the upcoming elections to the parliament in October, 2004) and clamed up for some time. It could be considered as a victory, not the final one, but very important one. I think that there is a very important the way how local small problem could be paralyzed by quick global attention towards it. And also I am very glad to see that world artistic community is much more united then bureaucratic one.

So, I want to thank you once more for your contribution, which encouraged local people to be brave, to resist and defend their own creed.

Good luck!

Sincerely  
Redas Dirzys <redas\_dirzys@yahoo.com>  
Director of Alytus Art School



## Appendix B

Date: Thu, 23 Sep 1999 13:59:38 -0400  
From: "Robert Creeley" <creeley@acsu.buffalo.edu>  
Reply-To: <creeley@acsu.buffalo.edu>  
Organization: University at Buffalo, SUNY  
To: "anya lewin" <anyalewin@hotmail.com>  
Subject: Re: how public is public

Dear Anya,

Reflective judgement may argue authority – but at best it's always too late. And who knows but the next person on the bus had his/her life changed just by looking. And who knows how many it takes to see anything at all to make a difference. You don't work that street, like they say, so don't worry about it. Neither does the bus driver incidentally. He doesn't really know even who's sitting back of him, much less what they see.

Anyhow! I had a friend years ago who conceived the idea of sending words forth slapped on the sides of subway cars in NYC, the Bronx I think it was – or maybe Far Rockaway! – so that the cars would carry single words through stations, in a sequence of sorts – and it would be an unexpectedly eloquent and free way to say HELLO, for instance – or WOW – or HELP. I thought it was a wonderful idea and he did do it, but of course there was no way to calculate the effect – no place to sign, or whatever. It just happened. In like sense, I had another friend here in Buffalo, then a young lawyer for the city, who one evening started quoting to me: "So much depends upon/ the red wheelbarrow/





glazed with rainwater/ beside the white chickens." I asked him how he happened to know that poem, and he answered, from riding the bus. It was on a placard, etc.

Granted our bus system is having a hard time these days – you may have seen the Buffalo News article of a few days ago, showing one lone rider for one primary route at an active time of day – still people do use it and some will look for sure. But again this should not be your side of things to worry about. You make the art, think of the application – and the rest is what life proves to make of it. Onward!

Best as ever,

Bob

-  
64 Amherst Street, Buffalo, N.Y. 14207  
Tel 716 875 2108 \* Fax 716 875 0751



## Appendix C

From: "Sandra Percival" <spercival@cca.edu>  
Date: Sat Apr 30, 2005 12:35:41 AM Europe/London  
To: anya.lewin@plymouth.ac.uk  
Subject: Re: Questions about the Fourth Wall

1- Were the works that you showed made specifically for the screening environments?

In 1999 we held two different seasons of FW (Fourth Wall) projections, one in spring and one in autumn. Both these programmes were curated with existing works by British artists. The first was shown Thursday and Saturday nights over 4 weeks in a programme entitled "Waiting, Plotting, Believing and Ending" (spring) and "Turner on the Thames" (autumn) which had works by Turner Prize shortlisted artists over the years who had works in film or video.

In 2000, Marie Jose Burki's work was commissioned for The Thames and Hudson Rivers Project and shown over a 6 week period as part of FW where we also had a short radius radio station to broadcast the sound within a 2 mile radius of the National.

In 2001, works by Pipilotti Rist and Dorothy Cross were shown - these were newly commissioned works. And in 2002, Darren Almond's commissioned work, 'A', was shown with a live performance by the composer, Lyle Perkins, and indoor projection on the closing night with in the Olivier Theatre.



I think information on all of these is on the website and there are brochures which can be sent to you.

2 - How did they work with the building as Decoration? Augmentation?  
changing the nature of the building?

"FW" is a theatrical term which is used to define the invisible plane between the stage and the audience. It is this idea of transforming the building into a "film" screen that we played off of, in particular with the terrace at its base serving as the audience space where there was a bar where you could get a drink and watch the projections. The projection appeared to dissolve the building, dissolving the boundaries between architecture, city, film and sky. It was not decoration.

3 - How do you think projection works in Public Space?

At the National it's a fantastic social space given the space of the terrace above the River and its visibility from here, all terraces at the National, from Waterloo Bridge, and across the River from the Embankment. Also the Lyttelton flytower has the dimensions of a movie screen which further adapt its use for projections. We also did an successful programme in Liverpool "Watching Ocean and Sky Together" during the 2002 Liverpool Biennial. I don't think all buildings just because they have a blank wall are necessarily good projection sites. FW functioned as an outdoor alternative to a gallery space, it was social and



theatrical through its context at the National, a cultural producing space as many people know it.

4- Do you think that projections in public space interact with the space of advertising - for instance large scale imagery in public spaces is usually advertising? If so did that affect the fourth wall?

Yes, it does intersect with the use of spaces for advertising. However, watching and listening to passersby on the bridges, it was clearly identifiable as "art". There was not known product or sponsor named, changing programmes and cadences with each. I don't think it takes too much to distinguish one from the other - we just have to worry about the city being taken over for advertising purposes - witness Heathrow airport.

5 - Who was the audience of the work? Were you looking for any specific relationship to the audience? From the website it looks like people are sitting in front of the "screen" like in a theater but I imagine people could also see it from across the river.

The audience was different for the various works. In 1999 it was very much an audience on the terrace for a 'production' as you see in the images. Also for the Rist, Cross and Almond works. Burki's work was more a work "occupying" the city - an image as she says that you pass by, as time passing by, the river passing by. Yes it was visible from many different locations - anywhere from which you can see the National Theatre. However, with the exception of Burki's





work and the radio, the sound was only audible if you were on the terrace of the National Theatre.

6 - Is projection a kind of spectacle and what purpose does a spectacle serve?

7 - What kind of spaces are you interested in projecting on? Do you think of the spaces as screens or is it a different type of interaction?

I think this is answered above.

8- In hindsight how did you find that the fourth wall" projections test the boundaries between art, theatre and film, performer and audience, viewer and viewed, inside and outside, and real and imaginary space. "

Also I think explored above; the audience clapped and interacted with the works, very different from the darkened gallery space - in this respect it was akin to a theatrical space for some works; in others it dissolved the building or transformed it. With the stage sets dropping from the Lyttelton flytower on to the stage below, the projections brought the image and imaginary outward while another imaging was inside. Theatre within the walls, theatre outside the theatres. Numerous individual works expressed each of these but if you didn't see the project, a picture is worth a thousand words.

9 - During my research I came across a group called artcritic - it looks as if they staged an intervention at one of the fourth wall events - creating a "fifth wall"



What was the reaction and did it affect the Fourth wall event?

We knew it happened, but it was not visible in relationship to FW projections nor was it to the audience so it had no affect on the event. We turned on the lights on that side of the building and that eliminated their image. The National considers this "trespassing" and thus will enforce and stop any unauthorized use of the space. It was done from a passing truck and they were reprimanded. This also occurred at Whitehall.



## Appendix D

From: simon poulter <simon@viral.info>

Date: Wed Apr 13, 2005 4:40:03 PM Europe/London

To: anya lewin <anya.lewin@btinternet.com>

Subject: interview

### 1. What was art critic and how many events did you stage and what were they?

Art critic was a collaboration between myself, richard milner and labyrinth (a projection company in london). I can't remember how many events we did but it took place from 1999 til 2001. The objective was to make anonymous incursions into London's art scene and subsequently the political world. most of the events were ad hoc, rapidly put together and notably without any funding involved.

### 2 Was it an attack on art institutions? (literally onto the buildings...)

The first art critic event was an attack on the Tate Britain building. Various people have attempted to disrupt the award of the turner prize, notably Bill Drummond and the KLF. So there was nothing particularly radical about doing this - but with a lot of pre-millennial paranoia around it seemed like it was worth doing. What amused me most was that the projection company asked me to sign a disclaimer saying that any legal action was my responsibility. This was largely due to the 'fuck reality' image that i had made. Subsequently they did not do this, which suggested to me that they thought it would be okay. There was a degree of caché for them in doing guerilla projections, in that there show-reel looked more edgy and they got more work. Being the 'bad ass' crew was useful to them when they pitched to clients, mainly national newspapers and



magazines.

### 3. Who was the audience meant to be?

We sold some shares in advance, although nobody got paid really. So a small group of people were tipped off that the events were happening. Other than that the audience was whoever happened to come along at the time.

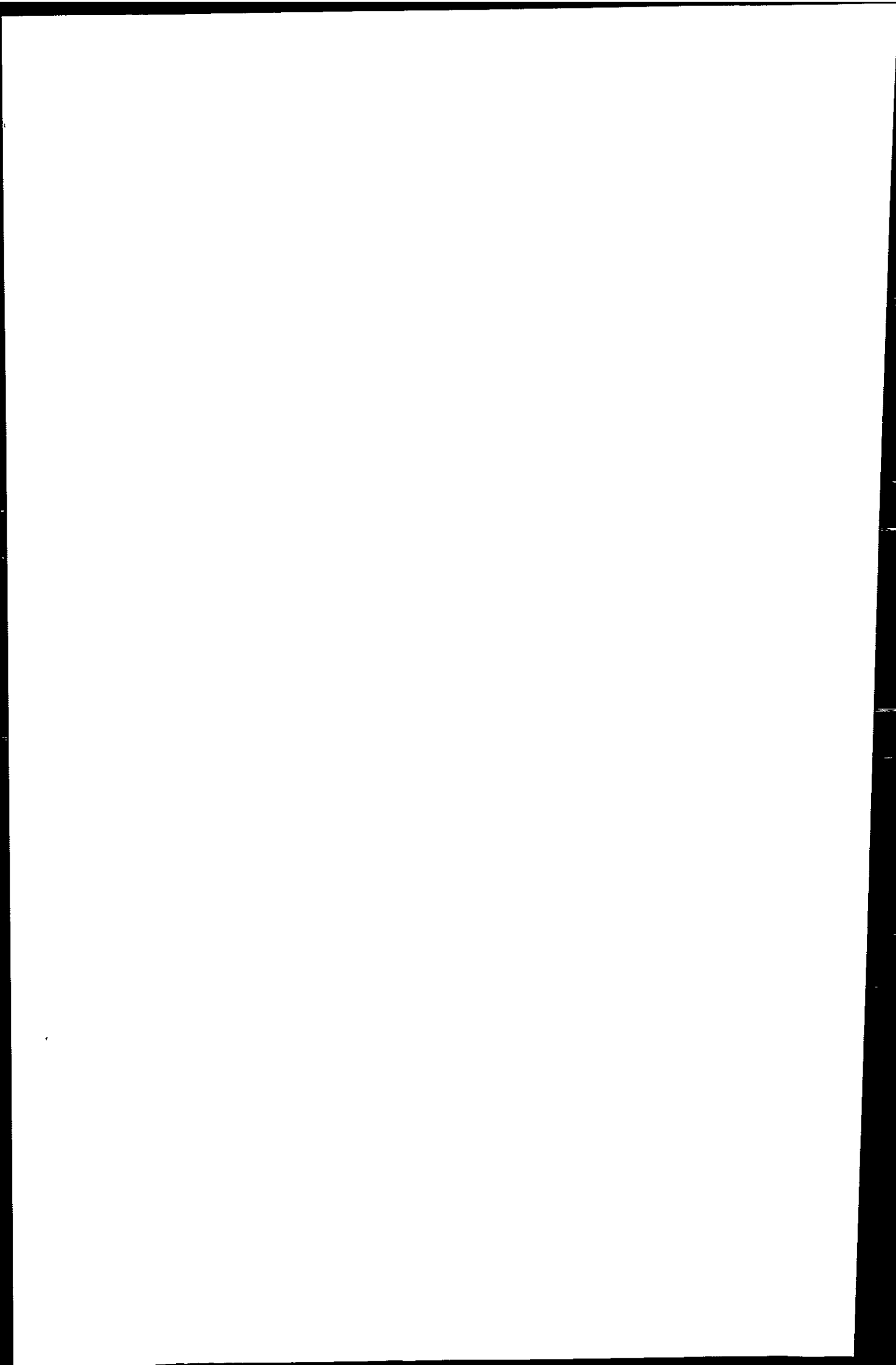
### 4. What kind of reactions did the project get?

This varied from acceptance to quite a few laughs. the most extreme reaction was from the fourth wall people. They really felt we had ruined their event. they had spent money, got permission and our show up and project attitude annoyed them. so they called the police. The police generally had a 'move along boys you've had your fun' view on what we were doing. All of this was of course pre-9/11, now i think if you drive around inner London in vans you would get more hassle. We tried to pull a major stunt at the opening of the Tate Modern by projecting 'support the government', 'be nice to people' and 'stamp out anarchism' onto the front of the new building. this was to be done across the river and required detailed planning, unlike the other events. Unfortunately somebody tipped off the police and we were all stopped and questioned.

### 5. On the Fourth wall website it says:

*Fourth Wall* , PADT's ongoing programme of outdoor projections of artists' film and video, turns the National Theatre into a giant screen above the River Thames .... The *Fourth Wall* projections test the boundaries between art, theatre and film, performer and audience, viewer and viewed, inside





and outside, and real and imaginary space.

It seems to me that artcritic by adding a fifth wall asked a question about public space - who gets to use the surface of a building is the outside space belong to the private institution. Did this dialogue interest the forth wall?

That is a very accurate assessment. The fifth wall to me was a movable space, one which we took with us. It also alluded in a funny way to four dimensional space, things like Ouspensky and Gurdieff. and Malevich's image 'victory over the sun'. The van was totally set up for rapid delivery of images and on one occasion I remembered that we projected on the British library while the van was moving.

6. What were the specific aspects of the medium of projection which guided the interventions?

Single shot high quality image, so they looked great. 10 by 8 slides that just looked lush. I love this medium because it actually relates to film in its quality. so digital can look hi-res. with the crew we had, we could just do things very quickly. a few phone calls and away we went. this kind of 'cell' like structure of course is well used by terrorists (IRA, Al Quaida). i did not see us as terrorists though, we were very much connected to a tradition of anarchism and situationism. Emma Goldman and Guy de Bord.

7. Is projection particularly suited to the idea of intervention?



Yes it is. It's so direct and it rapidly conveys the message.

8. The projection of the pound coin seems different than the other projects - more ambiguous in its intention? It could be taken as an anti euro stance. Can you talk about the intentions and ideas behind this project?

This was ambivalent. I have used this Trojan horse method a lot in my work. Essentially you take the orthodoxies of the target and push them further. I did this with UK Ltd in 1995. The intention was to project the coin on all of London's famous buildings, as if they were for sale for £1. so we did big ben, very cool deep respect to the projectionists, the natwest tower, bank of England, British library, Tate modern and conservative HQ in smith square.

9. Anything else you would like to add?

Yes. Working with Richard was integral. He fixes things, he is not fazed by anything and he created a lot of space to make it happen. Also we never claimed the events. There was no self-promotion. The independent wanted to feature the project but we turned them down. The work was in my head truly situational. You had to see it there and then, as a spectacle.

Simon Poulter  
[www.viral.info](http://www.viral.info)  
[simon@viral.info](mailto:simon@viral.info)

'whatever you feed into the machine, the machine will process'  
[william s burroughs]



## Appendix E

From: Richard Milner <rsm@element.demon.co.uk>

Date: Wed Apr 6, 2005 8:24:04 PM Europe/London

To: <anya.lewin@btinternet.com>

Subject: questions

How do you think projection works in Public Space? For example as an intervention? Decoration? Augmentation? – Or perhaps different projects (art critic vrs waterscreens) take different stances – could you give some examples?

I think it varies from space to space and from project to project. I try to consider a number of things. I'm from a theatre background and would say that I therefore consider audience and their movement, thoughts, attitudes as central to the work. The really good work has got inside peoples' heads in terms of all of this and I try to look at things very much from their standpoint. Therefore scale can sometimes be best appreciated from a real distance rather than up close. I remember seeing Fourth Wall which was showing Film and Video Work on the National Theatre Wall. The private view only allowed for visitors to view the work from close up, say like in a cinema. It was flat and it was dull. And everyone thought this (apart from the organisers!). Yet from the other side of the river against the London skyline it looked stunning and simple, like a tiny picture box. I think sometimes people get too close to a project and miss the real dynamics of projection. I guess it comes down to a combination of experience and gut instinct. It such a physical thing you see that sometimes you've just got to go with the drama of the work, whether it's gatecrashing, as with artcritic or providing ephemeral spectacles as with Waterwall.



Do you think that projections in public space interact with the space of advertising? If so how does that affect the projects you do?

I don't quite understand this question. Maybe I should say that advertising as a media suffers from over familiarity and the public go into a sort of zombie-zone when nothing really goes in and everything just washes over.

Public projections if the content and context is smart and current can crack this so there is a heightened level of engagement, but ad agencies rarely get this dynamic and so just go for big-dick-large-scale-anywhere-will-do-as-long-as-it's-famous type approaches. There have however been a few campaigns where the site, time and content was thought out more creatively and these have got the pressprofile because there's a story. These days that's the biggest payback -the press - as blasting an image or slogan on a significant building is no longer a novelty.

As far as projects I do is concerned it only effects me by seeing how a shift can make things go right. You think why not go for this building or go for this date. And I guess that affects how I work. Certainly artcritic came about from seeing a number of guerilla ad projections, sussing out some shows and inviting some asshole wanker who took pleasure in pain and who had what ended up as the unplanned brief to spoil art parties with art.

Who is the audience of the work? Are you looking for any specific





relationship to the audience?

I think I said this at the beginning. The audience are crucial and you can really play around with them by using this sort of work. Sometimes by switching around contexts where scale is played around and tiny projections are called in for the purposes of getting through an emotion. I always like the perversity of playing around with emotions and try to get artists to really get inside heads. Most artists I work with regularly (like Simon Poulter) do this effortlessly and that makes my job easier and more comfortable, but some need showing how the audience feel. It's a shame when an artist misses the chance to really get in someone's head just by not being bold enough. I guess the main thing I'm looking for from the audience is emotion (like in theatre?) whether that's joy, sadness, anger, delight or just plain confusion. In London especially everyone has so little time to stop and think and if you can do that even for a few seconds you've cracked it. Projections and really sensitive use of space can do this I think.

Is projection a kind of spectacle and what purpose does a spectacle serve?

Yes definitely. I mean it doesn't have to all be about spectacle, as I said sometimes playing around with extremes where something of scale is given a small site and vice versa can work well. Again, I think it'd down to getting in people's head. That's why when you look at the dvd you probably see loads of performers, because scale and performance completely entrance.



There's something deeply moving about the combination of the two, a bit like when you see a human being achieve some magnificent physical feat like trapezing or jumping from a height. It wakes something up. So again the projection can be spectacular, sure, but it is also so much to do with content, I think and context, in understanding the location and anticipating the audience's feelings.

Have you mostly done projects in Urban space or have you worked in rural places too?

Mostly urban. But only because that's all I get asked to do. I would love to do rural, but I would have to take the same principles, which are that there has to be some dynamic of surprise or intent. A load of artist and their mates and a few funders going on a bus together to some godforsaken armpit in the middle of nowhere when the rest of the world is at home watching Pop Idol just can't do it. It's in moments like this that I would have to question the value of my own existence. And the artists. And their mates. And the funders.

What kind of spaces are you interested in projecting on? Do you think of the spaces as screens or is it a different type of interaction?

I try to look at the space as it is and to work with what you're given.

That is the challenge and the dynamic. I hate this white screen suspending on a washing line mallarky. You're saying you don't trust the work and the



kit and lack guts. You have to take in the site and its context.

As far as sites of interest I always seem to go for bleak as you make a difference there I think. Either that or something that lends itself perfectly to an idea. I think if you walk into a space and see the work and then suddenly notice the dynamics of the space and think, even if that space is really bleak then you've cracked it.

You work in many different type of venues - do you think the context defines what the work is ? for example is it in the art context? clubs? Public sphere?

Yes, I've said this loads of times haven't I? But what type of context I don't know. Sometimes is just good to go anti-contexting without trying to be too laboured or ironic where something is just so wrong it's right (if that makes sense). But I think what defines the work is also the practical such as technical, budget, the client and getting access and so sometimes you just get on with it.

Much of the equipment used for projection is expensive and hard to access -it often gets used for scary son and lumiere shows for instance at the pyramids ect - how can more artists get the opportunity to work with this medium - is it a question of working collaboratively? have you developed relationships with the companies who make the equipment ?

I have developed some good relationships yes, and they have grown to



understand how I work and that I don't do conferences! To get access to the kit more artists need to get aware of how to use the kit and to skill up and then they can start to work out exchanges. The main problem is negligence by artists. This kit is so expensive and there are rules in looking after kit. In truth, I would never pass on kit to artists I don't know without a tech. It's almost like there needs to be some sort of test or exam so that the artist is accredited (very formal I know) and then everyone knows the kit is in safe hands. Then artists can dovetail other gigs and get hold of cheap kit which is away from the hire companies anyway. Another thing that would help is if the artworld could just relax a little and be more ad hoc. So an artist could say - 'I might be able to blag some cheap kit for this gig, but please don't crucify me if it is hired out late on by the company and I can't hold of it.' Companies have to make money you see but do sometimes co-operate if they are involved in something that allows them to blow you out if a big cash hire out comes in late in the day. I guess if art organisers (and whingy artists) could deal with small contingencies in the event of the surprise bonus megablasts doesn't come off then everyone could gain (as most of the time it does come off). But even though they can't produce the cash, they want it all somehow as a package and guaranteed when the real world just can't give them that. I know it sounds like I'm ranting but they just lose out really and I think that's a shame as the public and artists don't see something special because everyone's too frightened in being exposed if the hire company has to let you down for the





big wonga. I've turned down a lot of low cash gigs in my time because they just won't allow an unlikely get-out clause for companies and won't work to option b contingencies of scaling down.

Speaking of collaboration - you seem to work with a core group of people -how does that work? are roles clearly defined or is it a more organic process?

It depends on the gig. Mostly it's defined and those who work with this get the work. As it's quite audience and client focused there is no space for prima donnas you see. I know everyone really well you see and who works best with what. But sometimes I do get bored not with the work but with life and what I'm doing and want to open up my own head. I remember Simon said once about the sense of freedom you get from the guerilla gigs. It's true. There's a buzz you get from catching a train with two minutes to spare just as there is with watching the rozzers drive off with your slides.



## Appendix F

From: lorenzo tripodi <loreso@tin.it>

Date: Mon Mar 3, 2003 6:22:25 PM Europe/London

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Subject: HUMO reflections

Dear Brian and dear all,

here some quick reflections about HUMO.

As you know, my main interest was in the theoretical frame: I'm developing a research on practices creating public space in the contemporary city. I'm very much interested in concepts as "relational space/architecture", and Rafael's work already attracted my attention before discovering HUMO. So, my only regret is that we had to be so brief in the morning discussions: I found your introductory lecture really brilliant, and I would have deepened the topics that you introduced. But on another hand, I support a theory that springs from continuous confrontation with practices, so I really appreciate these 5 days full immersion that mixed technical and a practical issues with personal language's research. It is always very enriching to know each other with different people and to establish operative way of doing. It was quite interesting to observe the way that other partaker chose to use the HUMO



device... from subvertising techniques displayed by Noel, "detourning" the language of the corporations into critical issues, to the upsettingly intimate world suddenly springing from Anya's images (just to quote two opposite attitudes, I found really interesting all the different approaches showed ...).

I have to say that HUMO didn't really change my way of thinking such interventions. As my experience is more of a media activist, concerned with collective and connective intellects, Temporary Autonomous Zones and demonstrative actions, than as visual artist dealing with a personal and characterized production, I'm quite used to this chaotic and compromissory way of doing, rushing in very strict time, and looking at the process of collective production as the main object of my interest. Au contraire, what was new in this case is the relatively high technological level of the means available and the fantastic organization provided by Eva, Mav, Stefan and all the AEC crew, something that often (but not ever) lacks in selfmanaged actions...

What lacked to me is an immediate and direct confrontation with a public, but this limitation was quite implicit in the workshop modality. Having a better knowledge of the technical potential of HUMO platform, I think that we all would go on with this sort of experiments focusing more on "interactional" aspects.



Assuming that the cities are increasingly acquiring the role of screens displaying the corporate power's discourse, my interest is in how can we enable a better access to these media by the public. And when I say public, I think less to the meaning that this word has, at least in Italian, as synonymous of "audience", and more of an Habermasian sense of some common intellect able to act between (or, in a more radical sense, against) "state" and "market" as planning agents of the society. So, is not only the mere capacity to express opinion but more widely to build discourses that I'm thinking of. Even if it's not very clear to me where the limit is between the two things.

More and more urban laws and taxations are accomplishing a sort of time lotting out of cities' displaying surfaces (Virilio docet). Projecting on urban surfaces is still a sort of free frontier, hard to be regulated by the profit guaranteed society (but easy to repress as a traffic problem). By my side, I find interesting and constructive the devaluation potential that such forms of free expression can have on the market dynamics.

About the images that I elaborated, my first instinctive intuition of what was going to work out was the right one. Then I tried to have more elaborated images, more processed ones, but the effect wasn't really satisfying. I came back to the essence of what I'm doing in my daily





practice: capturing apparently irrelevant signs and signals from the city's surfaces, rescaling and cut'n'pasting them. Simply juxtaposing these projected skin with other "hard" urban surfaces (geometries and escape points of the highway bridge, i.e.) gave a very strong effect. If I had more time, I would have spent some time in exploring a little bit Linz, looking for indigenous signals to amplify.

I hope that my contorted statements still make some sense translated in english and I look forward your reflections and comments.

Ciao a tutti

Lorenzo



## Appendix G

Anya Lewin Interview with Steven Eastwood

June 9, 2005

Exeter

Duration 35 minutes

Recorded on mini DV transcribed by Anya Lewin

Anya Lewin = AL

Steven Eastwood = SE

AL: How long has OMSK existed?

SE: The first OMSK was in November 1995 in a German drinking club in Bond Street and then we did it in a couple of other places including Conway Hall which is the ethical society, interesting place, in 1996. Then we did this one in a disused bank, which is where it kind of changed its form. But it's ten years old.

AL: How many events have you done?

SE: At a rough count it's 35, 36, 37.

AL: What is OMSK?

SE: Well OMSK is generally an event that has a number of different spaces where artists can bring their diverse practices to this kind of platform event and audiences are quite involved in the work. No two people experience the same kind of chronology of pieces through an evening.

AL: What has been and what is your role in OMSK?

SE: At the very beginning, and because this is going back to the mid nineties, a lot of these things weren't in place than in the way they are now, it was bringing together sound and film and performance. So in the first form of OMSK I was programming the film and video and we had somebody doing sound and



somebody doing the live stuff. It was mainly live comedy at the time. So I was part of this three, and then there was a fourth person who did the promotions and administration but it was very very low scale, very small. It was largely showing our own work at that stage and bringing in a few people that we knew and then I wanted to expand it. I wanted to bring in much more challenging and eclectic practices so I started to become more of the, I've never liked the word programmer or curator, but more of the conceptual force behind it, always trying to shape it into something unexpected. I suppose after a couple of years of doing OMSK I was really the main person behind it and that was how it remained until the late 90's when I ran out of energy basically, and wanted to get on with my own work, so I thought of killing OMSK. We did have the death of OMSK at one point, it was probably only the tenth OMSK we'd done, and then I brought back a lot of people that had been involved as artists and had come through the events and I had an emergency meeting and said I think OMSK is not going to continue if it's just me and so we formed a collective.

AL: That brings me to some of my other questions. Are you an artist-curator?

SE: I don't think I am and we've always had problems, not problems, creative challenges with OMSK because what would determine what we would or wouldn't show? What would determine what I would or wouldn't show? And it's true to say I have shown work at OMSK that I don't like because I felt that the work fitted in with the sensibilities of the event. So I think that's probably not what a curator does. And I've always been resistant to programming to theme or to type. I've always been more interested in work that there may be dialogue



between, but there may also be tension and clashes and all kinds of discomfort so I don't think I'm a curator, no.

AL: Do you think that the role of artist curator is hard to pull off because people want to know what you are?

SE: Well I suppose because OMSK isn't like a gallery environment, it's much more like a gig in a way, although I think the work is always very well received and people concentrate on it. I don't think anything is throw away in OMSK, but it's more like a gig so for me the artist role would sometimes drop away and the production management role would come up although quite a few people would say to me that they felt like the work was OMSK and that all of the individual pieces were elements in that work so I suppose I could say that OMSK was my practice for a while.

AL: Well I was going to ask you that - is OMSK is part of your artistic Practice?

SE: It is because I like working with contingencies and unexpected occurrences.

It is because I don't like polished sort of like finished things. I like things to go wrong and one of our mission statements was that nothing goes to plan and everyone has a good time so I suppose it is part of my practice in that way. I like being able to sort of navigate through things, and OMSK allows that. I think the thing with OMSK was, and this maybe a diversion, but we were always or I was always trying to get to what felt like OMSK. And each event was almost like, well we got that right but then this thing wasn't quite right, that band was just too commercial or why did that DJ just play stuff that I could listen to in any club or that film was, you know had too much money behind it or whatever. And





why do I criticize those things - I was always refining what OMSK was after each event. So in that sense it's a creative process, I'm definitely thinking as I'm doing it. I don't think that we got to the locked off "this is OMSK" event.

AL: Does OMSK ever detract from your practice?

SE: yeah, I think it probably - it's a difficult question - I've travelled around the world with OMSK and I've met artists and filmmakers and musicians that I've gone on to collaborate with so that has definitely informed and enhanced my practice. But doing an OMSK is a bit like putting on a production and it takes over your life. I mean I got better at it and I learned to delegate but certainly there was a time - I mean people still call me Steven of OMSK -even though I am not so involved in events now and I think for a time people didn't - I wasn't as much a filmmaker as I was the person who did OMSK so I made a conscious decision to cut back on OMSK and since then I've fully focused on my work. But Whenever I do an OMSK, whenever I am actually in that space and that doesn't matter if it's some kind of warehouse in Oslo or wherever a disused space in East London or Tokyo it's always felt like a space, a presence of mind, and I think I really love this and it definitely enlivens the way I do my own practice.

AL: So OMSK doesn't have a physical space - was that practical in not being able to pay rent in London or something like that, or was it part of the vision?

SE: We or I would describe us as nomadic and the press would describe us as nomadic and quite quickly the listings press, like Time Out, would spin us as the nomadic arts collective because every time we did an event it was in a different



place in London. I've always enjoyed that sense that the audience has to seek us out and experience us anew. It was practically difficult because you are always building new relationships with people that run spaces and you're always having to find new ways of getting PAs and video projectors in and that was a pain but I certainly thought that if we had a regular building it might institutionalise us. I did have fantasies about a building that would – I mean OMSK was part of this film festival called Volcano! Which was a cluster of different underground events and for a while we thought wouldn't it be great if we had a building and we all had studios above the space where we showed the work. I think that would have been great but I think the problem is London doesn't have many spaces like that its not like -if we wanted to do it maybe in Hull or somewhere. All those kinds of spaces that don't have connotations already like cinemas and galleries, any kind of blank space has been taken up by property developers and you just can't ... we used to do events in railway arches and an old textiles factory and they are all now transformed into work live apartments. For me I realised we weren't going to get a space and we were nomadic.

AL: Is OMSK site-specific?

SE: Well we've certainly called ourselves site -specific but I don't think its true to say that we ever were – I don't think that contextually that we have responded to the specifics of a site.

AL: Is the idea of temporary important in OMSK?

SE: I would also say probably not as well. I've wanted to do more durational events like I had this idea of OMSK renting a house or a flat for a weekend –



this is before Laura's HOME in South London – this idea of people coming around and eating being a part of the event, or sleeping being part of the event, and it being much more like a strange occasion or a radio space for OMSK but I don't think we can ever say we've been temporal. It's always been this kind of 8 to 12 or 9 until 2am- its like going to a prolonged gig. We did do an event that ran over nine hours across different buildings, and different spaces became available for different times, like one space above a pub was open for an hour for a performance so I suppose that was more temporary.

AL: Well isn't each event temporary – just a one night thing?

SE: Yeah, but because we built up a following, it's kind of like the band you really like come back into town except all the line up has changed. None of the musicians are the same, you know. Yeah, people will be like it's been a half a year and we haven't had an OMSK and we need another one.

AL: How does the collective aspect work?

SE: It doesn't anymore (laughs) when it did work and this ties into lots of issues of artists as administrator and artist as producer when it did work at its best there were around ten of us who were predominantly artists who in my fantasy all were involved in OMSK because it was developing their practice and developing some of their production skills. Certainly we all learned a lot about grant writing we all learned a lot about production management and we learned a lot about promotions as well as, you know, working with our practice. We had a number of people who were sound artists, a number of performance artists, and a number of film and video makers, and we also had some people



involved that were just technical they weren't really developing their work. When it was fully functional we would literally meet, go around the circle and whoever had an idea for an event or whoever had found a space would lead. Other people would say, ok I'll take care of the artists or ok I'll take care of the transport and it was kind of democratic when it worked. There were always tensions, not tensions, but there were always discussions around whether it was still some kind of, I don't know what the term would be, whether I was still presiding. Because its difficult, because I did it on my own, well I never did it on my own, because I did it largely from my head down for a couple of years its quite difficult to pass on that process, and that style as well. People would inevitably look to me and go do you think this fits? And I would always say well what do you think and I think it's probably fair to say that I didn't pass on the baton fully.

AL: That's hard to do.

SE: It's very hard to do and OMSK became something that I had seen grow up and I have very particular opinions about what the flyers should look like and how a press release should be worded, all these kinds of things because I think it was important that we had an identity. Of course that's difficult for other people if you are trying to pass it on but you are also saying that I don't think the press release should be worded like that... but we got there.

AL: Sometimes when you got funding, like Arts Council funding and different funding, did you find that bureaucratised process because you had to adhere to certain rules for the funding, a report, a way of working. Or did it just enable





you more because you had money?

SE: Oh I could talk and talk about that. We've had lottery money, arts council money, and London Arts money. There is no London Arts anymore but when it was around we had that and we've had lottery money again. I think all of the events that were publicly funded were not as good as the ones that weren't and that's a very interesting thing. I think artists within the collective that had been funded to make work for an OMSK event felt an added pressure or an expectation on what they were producing and because of the ambition of each event it never meant that that money was that substantial for any artist so it wasn't as if they could go off and make a big piece and bring it back, they were working with limited means. So it somehow felt as some of the funded events lost some of the DIY character maybe or some of the emergent qualities. Essentially we have always wanted OMSK to be a testing ground: its much more about trying something than bringing something that is resolved and if you've got funding you kind of feel like you should bring something that is finished. It meant that we could pay people to do our sound and to pay people to do our technical stuff and that helped. And we toured one event to Norway. I have very mixed opinions about public money and we talked about this in Volcano! a lot about whether it's better to get private sponsorship. I mean would it be better to get Beck's beer to sponsor an OMSK than it is to get Arts Council money and I am not that sure whether there is really much of a difference in the end. I think the best events for the artists and the best events for the audience were the ones that funded themselves through ticket sales and bar sales.



AL: Is OMSK an oppositional stance to the art system? Do you consider it that way when creating an OMSK or do you see it that way when you look at it?

SE: Well there are a lot of tactics with OMSK, I know you've written from De Certeau's text at times and I've always felt that OMSK had a situationist bent to it. It's never canonised the artist or elevated them that far above the audience and that's one interesting element. It's not theatrical in the way that the gallery is in that nobody is directed in how they should look at a piece of work and there isn't that kind of – OMSK isn't a sacred arts space so I think that there are some interesting attributes to the event there that critique other ways of seeing art. It's interesting because places like the Live Art Development Agency and Arts Admin that have been advisors to us and they've got very interesting attitude to OMSK – they will direct artists who come to them to us when they kind of don't know what to do with them. And I don't mean that, I'm not critical of them, we kind of like that because we felt that and I was speaking to an artist Robin Deacon, and artist who has performed with us many times over the years and he was quite sad to hear that there may no longer be any events because he felt that there was no other place for artists to work in that very very live raw inclusive sometimes challenging problematic space. He might take his work to a black box and there is a very different kind of connotation there then he would have at OMSK. So I think we often picked up more unpredictable ways of making art that galleries and cinemas can't quite contain so I suppose in that sense yes. I find galleries very difficult, I actually prefer cinemas to galleries, but I like OMSK better than both.



AL: You've shown your own work at almost all the OMSK events I think. Is that part of the ethos?

SE: Yeah, that's another interesting one because I was talking to someone the other day who programmed a Super 8 screening in Buffalo (NY) and she makes Super 8 films, but she didn't include any of her own work in the program. She felt that it was somehow indelicate or narcissistic. I don't see that at all. OMSK is a space for new work and if I've got something new I want to show I'll show it. Because I don't see myself as a curator I don't feel as if - it's never been - I don't think anyone would say that OMSK is like oh god we always go and see the same old artist's work that the people who do it just show their work. I'd show something if I had something. I'd say probably I've not shown in at least half the OMSK events.

AL: What do you think motivates artists to create opportunities for others? Are there models that you follow or is really just a certain personality that does it?

SE: It is a certain personality that does it because I think you have to like people and you have to like bringing your work into contact with others' work. A bit like when you go to a festival and OMSK has often been compared to a festival environment where there is discussion and afterwards people will talk about what they did. So yeah I think you have to like people and be an artist that wants to let your work be informed by other people's work rather than be that kind of - you know you go off into your studio and you produce and then when it's done you take it out. I think I'd also go back to something I said earlier that a lot of these events cropped up because there weren't these kinds of spaces to



show your own work so you had to make them and this taps into lots of things that interest me about the carnival and the underground which is a contested term but this idea of don't take your work to a sanctioned space where it becomes kind of a product of that space but make the space for the work and I think that's something that artists quite often do for themselves if they are interested in some kind of relationship between their work and the space or their work and the audience rather than their work being this kind of object that you pack up in a crate and it goes wherever. I certainly made OMSK because I didn't know where else to show my work. And the fact that OMSK was built out of that ethos meant that it became a piece in itself. I think that some artists are probably, and I say this uncritically, are much more absorbed in just making their work. We always said this in the OMSK collective that we needed people in the collective that had no inhibitions about using a role of gaffer tape. Because there are some artists that won't, there are some artists that are like I need this thing stuck there and they'll wait for someone to do it, and that's fine because they are used to that relationship between artist and space and venue whereas we were all people who wanted to muck in and you know put it on together. So it takes that kind of artist that isn't precious about it just being about their own work.

AL: What kind of audience does OMSK have?

SE: Incredibly diverse. My mum comes to OMSK, which is great, and she can't get any of her friends to come to it. Artists, the thing that is great about the format of OMSK is that you will get people that are interested in perhaps





electronic avant-garde music and then they will experience video or live art concerned with the body whereas if they had just gone to a sound gig at the ICA they wouldn't have had that. And you'll get independent filmmakers that are probably pretty much absorbed in film and wouldn't be going to the Live Art review would come to an OMSK event and see live art. There are lots of cross-over artists and practitioners in the audience - friends of - OMSK managed to tap into a late night culture in that it would go on to 1 and 2 am people often drank a lot at OMSK so I think quite a lot of people saw it as like going to the carnival where they could stay out late and have something extraordinary hopefully to tell their friends about the next day but they may not be artists remotely. And then we've had people come because they've seen the flyer like some people came that were in their seventies once and loved it. So it's pretty diverse.

**AL:** Is there an event that you think was the best OMSK?

**SE:** I think a personal best for me would be one that we did in a warehouse in Brick Lane in September 2002 and mid way through the event there was a power cut and nobody realised because they just thought it was part of an event. We had all manners of things going on that night it was a perfect space for us. A huge basement we had video installation we had a back room where Helena Bryant did this performance with this inflated house and foam and there was a room just for video there was a big space where we had live music going on and tons of people came I think four or five hundred people came to that event. That was a personal favourite I think that would probably be the one.



AL: How do you know when something should end?

SE: You mean on the night?

AL: Well on the night or OMSK itself – you mentioned earlier you thought OMSK should end.

SE: Well on the night everything goes awry. the program - you can forget it. things just get shifted around because of logistics and quite often it goes on much later than we had planned you know we've had people say show the film programme again at like one in the morning and so we've done that because the venue has said ok so its over when you just get the feeling that it is done. In terms of the actual event over a course of years we are in an interesting place at the moment because a couple of people who have stuck with OMSK and been instrumental in OMSK really want it to continue but you need a group in order to get an OMSK off the ground. I personally think that things must change which sounds like a truism but you can't keep doing the same thing. we ran a danger – even though the art was always different and the building was different I felt like the concept wasn't fresh for me any more and I think it is better to quit while you are ahead and I'd quite like to go out in a blaze.

AL: Is there anything you would like to add as that is all the questions I have.

SE: Just some general things about occupying a space where things go wrong I really like that and I really enjoy that in OMSK. Sometimes the audience members might be a bit bemused but I like things that fail purposefully or not and this is something we worked on with the manifesto, which is purposely always changing, and none of us ever can settle on it because I think the point



that we decided "this is OMSK" is the point when it would run out of energy. I think that I want to reiterate that the event was always changing, our opinion about what should and shouldn't be included in it was always changing, the building was always changing, the art was always changing and our way of evaluating it was always changing, and I think that is quite important, which is another reason it should stop when it doesn't feel like that anymore. I do find galleries to be really dead, and there aren't really art cinemas anymore, and what I really liked about OMSK was it was a one off, every event was a one off and there was no way that you could repeat it. And I think that is something we are going to see more of somehow. I think people want resistant events and people want to be part of that resistance and people want something that is present. People want to be at something that isn't actually going to happen again and that they were there rather than something that is always mediated or duplicated. That's what I enjoyed about OMSK it was a picnic or a party.



## Appendix H

From: Kirsten Lavers <kirstenlavers@ntlworld.com>  
Date: Sat June 25, 2005 3:42:03 PM Europe/London  
To: anya lewin <anya.lewin@btinternet.com>  
Subject: interview

What motivated you to begin Taxi Gallery?

A coming together of various strands :

- a) inspired and excited by the space of a Taxi through witnessing audience interaction with the taxi used in Things Not Worth Keeping's tour to car boot sales of the Millennium collection
- b) change in personal circumstances necessitating a more home-based practice coupled with my own frustration with being an 'itinerant site-specific artist' (as described by Miwon Kwon) – wanting to stitch my art practice into my everyday life not keep it separate – I've never used a studio – mine has always been a kitchen table practice – Taxi Gallery is in many ways an extension/explosion from this way of working.
- c) Interest in curatorial strategies within a creative process – creating space for others to be creative

Why did you conceive of it as a three-year project? Is the idea of temporary important?

I remember a dynamic business acquaintance of mine once telling me that after three years it's time to move on to a new project. 1st year to find out, 2<sup>nd</sup> year to make changes/waves/structural changes 3<sup>rd</sup> year to consolidate and





handover. The idea of the temporary is as important as the idea of an extended duration – I'm interested in what will happen once Taxi Gallery is NOT HERE having BEEN HERE in terms of conversations and dialogues with its immediate neighbours – what might its absence generate?. So the work will continue beyond the three years of the "taxi in the garden" phase of it – this may become another distinct project with its own name etc or it may continue under the Taxi Gallery banner.

Three years is an extended duration and commitment compared to most site-specific art projects – this was also important to me though I never intended Taxi Gallery to be permanent – the actual timing only emerged as a clear decision about a year ago (2 years in).

Are you an artist doing a curatorial project or is it an artists project or both?

I'm an artist who uses curatorial strategies within my work. Actually I'm increasingly wondering about the usefulness to me of the term 'artist' – I'm veering towards the term 'cultural practitioner' – though when asked by Taxi drivers I do still say artist (for the time being ...) Taxi Gallery is work of cultural practice ... Taxi Gallery is an artwork .... Trying these on for size – an almost but not quite perfect fit...Still searching

Do you think the artist-curator is a hard role for people to understand – for example if you are seen as an organiser do people relate to you less as an artist? Here is a quote from Louise Short of Station – can you relate to what she



is saying?

Anya: Do you think of Station as part of your artistic practice?

Louise: Yes, because I saw it as a found object that could be responded to. A lot of people are critical of that. They say you've got to decide if you are a curator or an artist because it is too difficult to do both well and I said I am not a curator I just project manage the artists that make the work and I work with them in the context in a collaborative way.

Yes I can relate to this and I'm interested that it is the artist/artworld audience for Taxi Gallery that has struggled and questioned most my assertion that Taxi Gallery is an artwork- I am constantly being asked about my 'own' work and am met with confusion and raised eyebrows when I say that Taxi Gallery is my "own" work. Whereas the local audience, my neighbours etc when they ask "what do you do?" and I reply I'm an artist seem to be able to put this reply together with their experiences of Taxi Gallery quite comfortably. Interesting that in this area the 'arts' audience of Taxi Gallery has revealed itself as clinging to a conventional view of what an artist is and the local audience so much more "radical".

How did you see your role when working with artists - was it different in each case? Did you develop a curatorial vision as the project went on or did things just come up or both?

The artists I've worked with, their ideas, their responses to the Taxi, to the neighbourhood interaction, our conversations as we worked together - they



have been the key (but not only) material I've worked with in this project. And like working with any material as an artist whether it be an idea, or research or a physical substance – I've chosen it, I've happened upon it, I've played with it, I've taken risks, I've allowed chance to intervene, I've observed it, I've listened to it, I've pushed it, I've followed it, I've shaped it and I've let it shape itself, I've edited it, I've framed it ..... etc etc

Did you have any models for Taxi Gallery? Do artist run spaces need models or is it personality driven? Why do you think some artists take on the idea of giving other people opportunities as part of their own practice?

Mierle Ukeles and Suzanne Lacey's practice has often been in my thoughts as points of reference ... artist led/domestic based projects like Static, Home, Lounge gave me confidence (as did Small Presses) but weren't really models ... I've felt mostly that I've been making it up as I go along ... I think models are only useful to an extent – its important to pay attention to the particularities of the context in which you are working, models can get in the way.

Why do you think some artists take on the idea of giving other people opportunities as part of their own practice?

Partly artists wanting to move out of the solitary context of the "studio", away from the production of objects with price tag and the fetishisation of the solo authorial voice towards a more socially-engaged way of working, collaboration, participation, interaction, muddling and mixing things up - it's the creating space



for others to be creative thing ...

And maybe its not such a new phenomenon - maybe you could think about the Renaissance painters and sculptors studios with assistants along these lines - hierarchies aside - these contexts provided an opportunity for artists to work alongside each other to work on projects together to talk about work to receive feedback and support - I've really enjoyed and learnt a great deal from each of the artists who has come to install work and I hope this has been reciprocated - I've received as much as I've given - so many of the art world contexts place artists in competition with each other for commissions, reviews, funding etc - I think artists want to meet with fellow artists in creative and supportive contexts where real exchange can occur.

Did you ever show your own work at Taxi Gallery in the same way in which you invited other artists to do? If not, why not?

The flip answer would be Taxi Gallery IS my own work ... but also yes I have made individual projects : the Christmas installations and the RESOLUTION piece in the first year.

How is Taxi Gallery funded? As you got more "official" funding (i.e arts council) did your role change in that the administrative elements had to confirm to a larger agenda?

The first 9 months was self-funded - since then I've had two arts council grants and certain projects have been supported by Awards for All funding sought by





the organisation I've worked with (schools) - I've always applied as an individual and positioned Taxi Gallery as an art project thus the funding has not implicated me in any further admin than would normally be required from a solo artist - Taxi Gallery is a very admin heavy project though .... That's something I shan't miss - hard to find creative satisfaction in admin ... keeping meaning to read Buchloh on the aesthetics of administration .....

Is the Taxi the Gallery or is the taxi in the front yard of your home in a residential neighbourhood the gallery? I know that when I worked with you I decided to concentrate on the Taxi itself because I felt you were working with the rest of the context and that you could do that more effectively. What were some different approaches?

I'd say it's both AND its also the idea of Taxi Gallery and its the virtual presence on the internet. Most artists, like you, focussed on the Taxi itself but not all - recently Pamela Wells' piece Second Skin relied heavily in its conception upon the possibility that Taxi Gallery offered of community involvement and contribution - collecting plastic bags and packaging - and artists whose work required an intensive on-site presence such as Laura Robinson or David Kefford who are used to a solitary studio practice were both challenged and excited by the level of engagement and interaction that happened during their process of making. Helen Stratford not only took on the actual Taxi of Taxi Gallery but she also undertook a one-day residency with a Taxi driver working in Cambridge producing a beautiful book/pamphlet of outcomes from her notations of his day,



its routes and passengers. (archived on the website).

**How important was neighbourhood involvement to you?**

VERY !!! and its been the most elusive and tricky thing to draw out, - now that I've announced the end of Taxi Gallery suddenly I'm getting a great deal of feedback from people - telling me how much they've enjoyed Taxi Gallery and how much they will miss it. The current show includes a wipeboard inviting comments and responses to different questions that I'm posting about the sculpture - the level of interaction and lateral imagination being applied to this is really quite exciting and inspiring - I'm curious to see how long it continues ... and wondering whether it might open up a potential for an ongoing dialogue/exchange that might continue beyond the passing of the actual Taxi ...

**Has Taxi Gallery been effective in bringing together artists and audience?**

Yes - particularly if you apply the quality over quantity rule ... there are three broad groupings of audience for Taxi Gallery - there are the local people who live with it in their everyday lives - my neighbours etc - their interactions with artists on site have been informal often jokey but also quite profound at times - I remember an elderly neighbour saying that she'd been thinking about the piece "Bound" and that she decided that it was a manifestation of her confused mind ... another lady got very involved with Elspeth Owen's performance living in the Taxi and brought her hot cooked meals on several occasions - staying to chat and try to understand what and why she was doing the work. Taxi Gallery



offered opportunities for informal conversation and living alongside each other for artist and this particular audience that neither would normally have. The second more artworld/familiar audience who came to Taxi Gallery events really seized the opportunity that artist's talks and performances offered – these events often led to quite animated discussions following an artists' presentation – I'm used to artist's talks usually ending with a few rather stilted self-conscious questions – this was not the case with Taxi Gallery and in some way was due to the informal relaxed ambience of the Scout Hut used for these events but was also very much the spirit that I tried hard to cultivate with Taxi Gallery – where nobody need feel worried about being clever or saying the right thing but could be curious and questioning and open about their responses to the work. The website manifestation of Taxi gallery also attempts to provide the virtual taxi gallery audience (the third audience group) with as much as possible information about the artist's intentions, reflections upon the work and responses to it.

Has having Taxi Gallery as part of your home integrated your art practice with your domestic life in a positive way or did you sometimes wish there was more separation?

No I never wished for separation – I was/am looking for that integration – I like the everyday, I'm interested in the everyday – I want my work to exist and function within the everyday not as an escape activity from it and as I said mine has always been a kitchen table practice – I was a single parent when I went to



art college as a mature student so I had to find ways of integrating my domestic life with the demands of the course – it's the only way I know ...

How has Taxi Gallery added to your own practice and how has Taxi Gallery detracted from it?

Taxi Gallery IS my own practice.

Unlike most small artist run spaces you have carefully archived the process as you have gone along – in a way insuring its historical representation. Was it the technology of the web which made this possible and why did you decide to do this?

Having the skills to make a website and the potential that the technology offers to quickly and cheaply put a project OUT THERE was always my intention from the outset and is a big factor in Taxi Gallery achieving a public profile and in getting/finding interesting artists wanting to make work with/for Taxi Gallery. The third (web based) Taxi Gallery audience is as important to me as the more local art and neighbourhood ones. I've tried to make the website into a useful resource for artists and students and not simply a promotional tool – hence the detail with which each exhibition is archived, the online logbook and commissioned essays etc.

It seems to me that you have taken control of many aspects of Taxi Gallery's representation – commissioning essays, creating an archive, making





publications, in a way bucking the system of the artist who makes work, waits for a curator to show it somewhere, and hoping for a critic to review it. Was this a conscious ideology? Is Taxi Gallery an oppositional stance to the gallery system?

Not oppositional - just an alternative - galleries are fine - they have their place - and have an important role to play in supporting artists and cultural activity - its just there are things that they can't do, types of work that just can't operate within the gallery system - Taxi Gallery is one such type of work

Why did you call it Taxi Gallery - Why was it important to have the word Gallery in it?

I wanted something that was simple and clear - easy to remember and not overtly "tricksy" but yet it is - because Taxi Gallery is a gallery and it's not a gallery - more black cab than a white cube - it was a gesture towards dialogue with the neighbours - ... an opening gambit, I (wrongly as it turned out) assumed that most people would have some point of connection with the idea of a gallery and therefore would be able to access the conundrum of the taxi not being one - fairly early on some curious teenagers were gathered around the TG sign and asked me what it was all about and I explained that the taxi was an unusual kind of gallery and one of them asked me What is a gallery? I was taken aback - this experience gave me quite a different base line starting point for any further conversations.



Is Taxi Gallery a political endeavour?

It's a manifestation of my personal politics – politics with a small p maybe – its not campaigning on a particular agenda - there's politics in everything you do from the way you shop to the way that you interact with people.

Do you think of part of Taxi Gallery's mission as "social inclusion"? What do you think of the Blair Government's emphasis on the idea of social inclusion for the arts?

Well I don't think about it using that term but Taxi Gallery does enable a wide variety of people who otherwise would not deliberately set out to go to an arts centre/gallery to experience a broad range of contemporary artworks in their own time and at their own pace – the problem with a great number of "social inclusion" arts projects for me is that they are often token and tacked on to justify public funding - only reaching those who are already in some way opened up to art experiences (go to art galleries etc) ... – by just BEING here for an extended duration Taxi Gallery has allowed people to gradually approach it and engage with it in their own time and at their own pace – Taxi Gallery has never argued a social inclusion agenda in order to get its funding btw.

Having done Taxi Gallery for almost three years now have you developed new ideas on what art can offer a community?

There isn't "A" community that Taxi Gallery serves – even if you just consider



the people who live nearby or pass by regularly – it's a complex mesh of communities with sometimes conflicting and invariably differing interests/agendas, perceptions and experiences who basically share geographic residential proximity and little else. I think what Taxi Gallery and art in general can offer is a point of contact – a talking point – where conversation and dialogue has potential – a meeting point – everyone who lives around Taxi gallery or passes by it regularly has had to deal with it on some level – children, teenagers, elderly residents, mums taking kids to school, the postman, the dustbin men, foreign language students, young professionals in rented accommodation ... it has quietly and persistently invited response – even if that response has been to ignore it and pass on by. What art offers is permission for differing responses, associations and interpretations – a context to for sharing ideas – the possibility for a conversation between an old lady and a single mum where one is saying "its my confused mind" and the other is saying "it's strangulation" and both are okay – each is simply interested in the other's point of view. It took a while for that to happen – for people to feel confident in their own opinion – to stop asking me "what's it meant to be?" and to start just talking about what it means to them. Art offers 'difference' as a positive rather than a negative – it literally is something "different" capturing attention, provoking curiosity and responses and creates a situation where these differing points of view can be celebrated and shared rather than "tackled", erased or ignored. From this small starting point, a moment when two people can listen to each other's point of view with respect and tolerance, solutions become more



likely on issues where disagreement, differing perspectives and needs are in conflict and require resolution.

### How did Taxi Gallery fit in with other arts organisations in Cambridge?

Taxi Gallery clearly met a need amongst local arts audiences and artists for a context where work could be experienced and discussed within an informal and supportive atmosphere. Cambridge does not have an arts centre and the non-commercial galleries/museums are very anxious not to be seen as parochial – they seem to direct most of their energy on attracting the London based audience, reviewers, artists etc and are perceived as deliberately discouraging local involvement other than as passive receivers. Cambridge has an active and supportive music and to a certain extent writing/poetry scene but the visual arts struggle. Cambridge is also a divided city – the Town / Gown divide is pronounced and geographically clearly defined – Taxi Gallery is very much situated within the "TOWN" and has been largely ignored by the university arts scene which though reasonably vibrant is not interested in looking beyond its cloisters nor in involving people from the town with its activities. Arts Council East has been nominally supportive in that funding has been provided but in three years not one single arts officer has attended any of the numerous Taxi Gallery events, talks, openings, performances etc. I'm just about to meet with Donna Lynas who has taken over as Director of an out of town arts organisation – Wysing Arts – formerly of South London Gallery and she got in touch with me saying she'd been looking for the Cambridge Arts Scene and felt she'd found it





in Taxi Gallery ! .... Just as I'm curious to see what happens locally in response to the absence of the Taxi – likewise I'd hope for new emerging initiatives from the arts community in response to the gap that it has highlighted ...

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Lots I'm sure but in the interest of getting this off to you – I'll leave it there – my answers are sketchy and note-like – hoping they're useful nevertheless and thank you for the questions – they'll be useful for me to return to myself once I can find headspace for my PHD hat .... temporarily stuffed under a carpet of post Radio Taxi fallout etc ... somewhere ...



## Appendix I

Anya Lewin interview with Louise Short

Station, Bristol

June 5, 2005

Duration: 1 hour and 20 minutes

Recorded on a Nokia 6680 Mobile Phone transcribed by Anya Lewin

Anya Lewin = AL

Louise Short = LS

\_\_\_\_\_ = indistinguishable on recording

AL: How Long has Station been in Existence?

LS: Since 2000

AL: How many shows/events have you had in those five years?

LS: About 50, usually about ten a year.

AL: Has it always been here in this building?

LS: Yes – well no we've done a lot of projects outside this building.

AL: But it started here in 2000 by getting this building?

LS: Yes

AL: How would you describe Station to someone who had never been here before?

LS: I talk about it in terms of being a research space and we generally commission artists to make new work for this context or a project we might come up with outside this building itself. It's generally for new work but not always I like to often do what I say I'll not do – to contradict myself – otherwise I think it becomes – you're always getting approached by the same type of artists.

AL: Is that a conscious strategy to contradict yourself?



LS: It has become that because I thought that the work was becoming a bit samey you know people responding to bricks and mortar or the history behind the building. There is only so much of that you can do – there's more to be explored which is why I want to start doing more off-site work.

AL: What motivated you to start Station?

LS: Well initially I needed a studio space or I thought I needed a studio space because I had been evicted out of a building where I had a studio – but then I started renovating this building because it was partly derelict and I became more and more aware that there was an audience right here and that people walking past the building would encounter an artwork without even necessarily knowing that it was art and I thought that was more interesting than just using it as a space to make films in or you know – actually it's not a great space for a studio as it is a bit too damp. I thought it had more potential as a space for artists to work in.

AL: Is it part of Station's identity that it is an artist run initiative?

LS: Yes, one of the things that I thought was really important was that economically this space supported artists in as maximum a way as possible so in terms of money that we raised through funding it all goes, except for the printers, it all goes into the hands of artists. So all the technical help, all the design work and all the invigilation – everything is done by artists, or critics, or writers but certainly people involved in that whole debate.

AL: Do you think of Station as part of your artistic practice?



LS: Yes, because I saw it as a found object that could be responded to. A lot of people are critical of that. They say you've got to decide if you are a curator or an artist because it is too difficult to do both well and I said I am not a curator I just project manage the artists that make the work and I work with them in the context in a collaborative way.

AL: Do you define yourself that way to make it understandable to those outside the project while really you are a curator or do you feel that is an accurate description?

LS: I do actually – I still make art, I still have shows, and I still practice as an artist and you know people often need to pigeon hole you in a particular role in order to understand some kind of power relationship.

AL: why do you think that is?

LS: Because that is the way the gallery system works. You've got a gallery with a curator who patronises the artists and I wanted to talk more about running the space in terms of collaboration. So really it is an agreement between me and the artists I work with that they negotiate and I negotiate a certain kind of place for ourselves that involves a practice of mutual understanding that's a bit beyond just presenting their work and enters into a kind of dialogue and that feeds very much into my way of working as an artist and if it didn't do that which it sometimes doesn't I just feel completely flat. You know used up really and I don't like that.

AL: Does running Station ever detract from your practice?





LS: Yes in terms of time – yes that's really the way – but in many respects I kind of needed to shift my practice away from being an artist that produced sculptural work, installation to an artist that focussed on the situation and the context.

AL: Do you think of Station as an oppositional stance to larger art institutions or to the constructions of art institutions?

LS: I certainly set it up shortly after I had a major show at the Arnolfini and I felt that my position as an artist in relation to a big public gallery like the Arnolfini – being provided with an opportunity that was really special was actually made disappointing as an artist so when I came across this building and thought about it in terms of how I can provide a context for artists to work where they can have a long period of research before anything gets seen or that they can work along side the public on the project I thought that was an opportunity worth looking at and worth trying out. In many respects you spend a year working towards a show, you put it up, a few people come and see it, you don't hear a lot about it, you do a few artist talks, and then it comes down and that's it. I want a much more focussed and opportunistic kind of place that audiences and artists get together in the process of making artworks and the door always stays open and the public can come in if there is a project being installed or made and that felt really important to me – that it wasn't about presenting people with a finished project.

AL: How is Station funded and how has it been funded – has that changed in



the five years ?

LS: Yeh, it's problematic. In some ways even though I'm getting funded by the arts council at the moment I'm actually not producing as many shows as I had been when I didn't get very much funding at all.

AL: Why do you think that is?

LS: Some of it is to do with personal; circumstances at the moment not having as much time to put into the project but its also because the project needs to be managed a lot more thoroughly. Every penny has to be accounted for. You're doing a lot more marketing and publicity and you're doing much more work in terms of developing projects where they aren't actually seen so instantly, whereas before we just go right got an idea lets do it. But now we are pretty much \_\_\_\_\_, people get paid properly and I am much more tied up in all the admin.

AL: That leads exactly into what I was going to ask you - I have been reading this book about arts spaces in NY in the 70's and 80's and there is one essay by Brian Wallis where he is talking about the sort of insidious way that funding really did change the way that artists were running spaces. I am just trying to find a quote:

One of the disheartening conclusions to be drawn from Foucault's notion of governmentality is that even oppositional identities can be—or, perhaps, always will be—harnessed to the larger systems of social production and reproduction. Indeed, one might argue that oppositionality itself is a constitutive and programmed part of social organization. While the artists and organizers of alternative spaces always feared some sort of "institutionalization of dissent" through their liaisons with the NEA, the true nature of this governmentalist

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appropriation was quite different from what they suspected. It was not the case, for instance, that the state (through the NEA) dictated any particular type of art, in terms of style or content. Nor did the state directly proscribe the type or location of the new art institutions. Rather, through a series of regulatory guidelines, the agency established a new subject, the "professional artist," and a new form of administration, the "artist-run organization."

(Wallis, 2002: 177)

So I was wondering how funding changed the running of Station?

LS: Well I must say I don't burden the artists with the issues and the arts council wants to know the real specifics of the actual event but because I've just come to the end of the financial year I'm having to write documents and talk about figures and numbers of people, what age group, what ethnic origin, things like that which before I didn't. You know it didn't seem to be that necessary or relevant. I certainly don't push artists to say what they are going to come up with. I try and keep it open. And sometimes I've really come unstuck with that. An artist has produced work that is entirely different than how I envisioned it and sometimes they've got it completely wrong in my eyes and in the eyes of quite a few people who are regular supporters of the space and I think that's necessary. It is just one of these things that happens with - it's a consequence of taking risks. We had one artist that did some pretty critical things in her work. She recorded people's responses to the Bristol art scene and edited them together and re-presented them in a way that many people objected to. They felt that an artist was pitching art and public galleries with private galleries, with artists and audiences and critics in a really negative way and it backfired actually quite badly. So, but another thing actually despite having funding I still



don't get permission from anyone to do anything here and I still don't pay public liability insurance at a business rate and that's saved a huge amount of time and money over the year but I know that it's a risk and I should really do it but I just see that as being a waste of money.

AL: Do you rent this building?

LS: I rent it from the city council for ten pounds a week and they also give me two parking spaces which I rent out for ten pounds a week each and that money gets put in my pocket and we use that money to buy artists food and drink during the time they are here, generally, not always, but most of the time. And that doesn't go to the books.

AL: In the sense of if it is an oppositional space or not I was wondering how you fit in with other art institutions in Bristol?

LS: well since I started this space there have been about 5 small artist led initiatives which have suddenly sprung up in the city so maybe it is a kind of trend as well where artists are being approached to take control of what context they show in and how they do it.\_\_\_\_\_ Each one of those projects is quite distinct. I mean there is a degree of militancy here. I try and promote that militancy - we are not necessarily oppositionally doing a different kind of work - but artists feel that freedom and I take the risk than they've got that freedom to do what they like. The Cube I think is one of the most interesting kinds of organised, well, unorganised or disorganised kind of anarchic structures that runs through pure enthusiasm and I think that they probably do much more there than I can do at Station. The Cube provides a really interesting context for





people here (Bristol) interested in fringe things to get involved in the production and showing of those works and I think that is really important in a city like Bristol that is so much about Status Quo. It's got such a high talent – so outwardly structured in terms of class and race and gender. Bristol is so old fashioned – although artists haven't perhaps conformed massively to that sense of the gallery being the penultimate space to show, waiting for a curator to arrive and give them a show, I mean it's only recently in the last five years that spaces run by artists themselves have opened because they've been to places like Glasgow, Newcastle and Liverpool where artist projects like that have been running for years.

AL: Why do you think that it has taken so long for that to happen in Bristol?

LS: Well it's such a staid middle class place – you've got places like Spike Island \_\_\_\_\_ it was possible in its own circumstances. Well let's get studios where it's all very easy to be there, with cheap rent, and kind of luxurious really it's amazingly luxurious. Artists have fallen into that as a model and you wait for curators to come from London and they come and look at your work. Well what's happened is that it's really interesting since the Arnolfini shut down for refurbishment 18 months ago or even two years now is that nobody's been coming to Bristol from London. It was hard generally to get them to come to Bristol but it's been even harder to get anyone to come. There's been a distinct kind of absence of curators since the Arnolfini has been shut. We are in a loop. We are not in opposition we need each other actually quite massively. Well I think so anyway.



AL: How do you pick the artists you work with? At the beginning you said you like to challenge your own things, which you set up. Do you have a curatorial vision or do different things just come up?

LS: It has been quite unthought actually. It might be that there are slots, or a particular way someone might approach me, and a particular focus that they might have which I think is interesting and I'll go for it but I've got to feel that I get something out of it. Often I get artists that approach me and they say this is a perfect venue for such and such and then I say no that's not what I'm interested in., that notion of it being a perfect venue for something. I actually want it to be more challenging than that so often it's a circumstance like finding the tunnel. I just knew that Heath Bunting was the person to contact because of his work and also as a result of that project we built a huge glass kiln outside to melt the sand from the tunnel into glass. I wanted to see what colour the sand would melt into - you know what colour it was in order to look at the historical. Whether it fit in historically to the early glass making in Bristol, which it did. It was the same colour and all those tunnels and \_\_\_\_\_ were dug for \_\_\_\_\_ and I knew that it should come out a certain colour. In order to build this glass kiln I thought what do we do

AT THIS POINT THE RECORDING DEVICE STOPPED WORKING. THE REST OF THIS INTERVIEW IS NOT A TRANSCRIPT BUT A RECONSTRUCTION FROM NOTES TAKEN.



Should we work with experts or people who hadn't worked with Glass before. Lady Lucy (a Bristol artist) was working on Ladyfest and we raised money together and built in the kiln project. We did it with 5 women who had never worked with the material. They worked as a team for a week and a half to construct a kiln. It was appropriate to work with people who had never used the equipment. The project was a conduit. They forged friendships between each other. It was dangerous and scary. None of them were artists but it worked.

AL: Going back to your comment that it is important that you get something out of the projects at Station what do you get out of it?

LS: It's hard work done in the background and I need to get a thrill of seeing something unique, a one off which hasn't happened anywhere. Getting to know artists is important as thinkers and people.

AL: Is it a social endeavour?

LS: I am one of those rare people who like private views – the party – talking about art – to have a space for conversation.

AL: Did you have any models in mind for Station?

LS: I thought it would only last a year or two at the most. I am now considering getting out of it.

AL: Do artist initiatives work from models or people's particular personalities?

LS: It's entirely about dynamics between people. The more one puts in the more one gets out, it's simple really. Arts organisations need a group dynamic, risk and vision.

AL: Do you think bigger institutions generally take fewer risks?



LS: In the short term they can take risks but taking risks could than become boring. People should not run organisations for a long time. I can't keep living from Station so I need to pass it on so I can make a living. There are ways I could make money from Station but I don't want to replicate the gallery system.

AL: Have you ever shown your own work at Station?

LS: No. But running Station does sometimes benefit me. I was recently on an exchange to go to Croatia and two Croatian artists came here – This was because I had a place to offer. There was no equivalent in Croatia. This opportunity came up with some other artist led projects – we had created so many opportunities – so you get an opportunity now. It all happened through long-term collegueship between Station, PVA, and Stroud Valley. They mutually support each other's practices.

AL: What do you think about the Blair government's social inclusion mandate and how does it relate to Station's interest in bringing artist and audiences together?

LS: (looks disgusted) Artists should be distinct from the public, well I'm being ironic. We have to think about how government agendas filter through the Arts Council to artist led spaces. It's a problem if people start making "worthy" art. Artist are forced to lie about what they did – counting numbers etc. Artists are asked to do the impossible – making work is not important now – only audiences. But audiences come because there is good work. Its word of mouth which gets and audience more than marketing and advertising.

AL: What type of audience does Station have?





LS: Artists, the gay community, people who live in the boats, kids in the flats nearby, passer-by's. There are huge summer day audiences of people on the docks. On open door day (run by the architecture council) 2000 people came to see the tunnel.

AL: Is Station a political endeavour?

LS: Yes. In my practice I am wary of producing work that can't be understood by anyone. I hold the same policy for Station. The artist, or myself, or a student is always here and they know the work intimately so that they can answer questions and also get response and feed back to the artist. It's an exchange system. Artist's haven't always done that, I am not making a value judgement, but it is what I want for Station.

AL: Can you give an example of a show that fulfilled what you want for Station?

LS: None of the shows fulfilled everything but Louis Nixon was an interesting one, He made a rolling barrel that rolled from wall to wall in the space for a month. It was noisy and passed the open door few seconds and would bang on the wall. People walking by would pop their head in and check if everything is ok - we would say yes come on in and they would ask questions. Are you worried it's going to hurt the building, how does it work etc. It was a simple work rich with ideas and it brought people into the space and they didn't know what they were looking at.

AL: I noticed you never call it a gallery. Why?

LS: If I called it a gallery I'd get tons of CV's and slides ( I already do) and Station is about a different relationship and use of space. When Michael Snow



showed here while he had a show at Arnolfini they put a sandwich board outside saying Arnolfini - so they tried to claim the space. Station isn't for hire - it's against the ideology. It's a control issue. Every show can't be brilliant but the terms are different.

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## Appendix J

Caroline Koebel interview with Anya Lewin

July 26, 2004 Approx. 40 min.

Patisserie Valerie Soho, London

Recorded on Mini DV transcribed by Caroline Koebel

Caroline Koebel (CK): What inspired you to open Cornershop?

Anya Lewin (AL): I think I always wanted to do something like Cornershop, and Buffalo felt like it really needed it because there was all this creative activity and (not many) places to put it, and what spaces there were divided by discipline somewhat.. I wanted one space where different things could come together. The Poetics Program and Media Study [both within the University at Buffalo, SUNY] inspired me. I was working with artists and poets and they weren't coming together anywhere. When I lived in Pittsburgh, before Buffalo, I was going to the Orgone Cinema events. I got an education in experimental film through those guys and somehow they just put things on themselves. So, I think I was looking since I got to Buffalo and then 82 Lafayette came up, and I knew it was the right place to do it.

CK: How would you describe Cornershop to somebody who's never even heard of it?

AL: A funky little space in a residential neighborhood —just a box really —that had these really mixed up events that were very social. There were committed audiences for the actual thing that happened, but there was also a big awareness that you would see people, you would talk, you would have some drinks, you would go out after. So, it had a whole atmosphere that was serious



about the work, but that was also serious about making a social space.

CK: Could you talk about the conditions enabling you to open Cornershop?

AL: One: cheap rent—it was only fifty dollars a month and when I saw the place it was completely boarded up and not really usable, but I immediately talked to the landlords about, “could I make this into a gallery/studio space and have events?” and they (Grace and Mark) said, “yea, sure!” and they even did a few things to contribute to it like fixing a window and making another wall. It was never officially funded—ever— (I was never paid anything and put my own money into it.). I did get money for events as it went on from the poetics programme and cosponsorship from other arts organizations such as squeaky wheel, CEPA, and Just Buffalo but it was a very casual system. In the beginning there was no funding at all. But it was a supportive atmosphere - just having landlords who wanted to do it, and the fact that I knew so many artists that I thought would contribute to it.

CK: What was the neighborhood like?

AL: Very working class, kind of old time Buffalo—not that many renters, most people own their homes, lots of Italians and people who had been there a long time, and definitely not very wealthy. Actually Robert Creeley describes it beautifully in his letter. Ill just quote from it:

an old edge indeed just off Niagara Street which runs along the river and is largely an old Italian neighborhood. Houses here are still insistently ‘single dwellings’ and despite the poverty there is a persisting sense of neighborhood. So someone coming in is really looked over, not hostilely but particularly.

(Creeley, 2004)





CK: Because Cornershop was geographically distant from the city's other cultural spaces, it was an overt –and not an incidental–destination for those who attended exhibitions and events. Does the fact of the audience's specific journeying from home to Cornershop have any significance for you?

AL: There was a sign that said Cornershop hanging over the Door , (actually two signs the first was stolen) but because it was only open on the night of the event except for a few times when people kept the keys and had a longer show, it was mostly a word-of-mouth or you just knew about it (even though I tried to advertise a lot). I liked that: that everything was an event, a performance, whether it was paintings, sculpture, installation, actual performance, it always was a performance of the space—and I think that's what I wanted: that it was the space itself that performed. When I was fixing it, I purposely left the big window open so it wasn't like a closed white cube; I left stuff because it was a corner shop—remember, it said "Tea and Salada" on the right upper window? —and it had the giant radiator in the middle (which I thought was hilarious). So, the space had its own personality as well, even though of course some of it played to the gallery feel: white walls and things like that.

CK: You mentioned Orgone Cinema in Pittsburgh. Could you talk more about Orgone, and could you discuss some other models of alternative spaces that may have encouraged you to open your own?

AL: They were the only model; I just didn't know that much about the history of alternative spaces. Their events were fun and had a DIY feel to them and I liked that. I definitely made Cornershop up as I went along. So, Orgone was Greg



Pierce, Alisa Dix, and Michael Johnson. Once a month at the Silver Eye Photography Gallery in Pittsburgh's South Side they would put on screenings of obscure experimental films, and they would either curate something or have someone come and show their films. There were always about 20 to 60 people, and they'd organize it all on their own. It was great. They would do raffles and they had a letter print press—and that was a big part of it; they'd make these amazing posters for all the events. Orgone had a homemade aesthetic, and they would make stickers and buttons. I did a lot of that at Cornershop, totally because of their influence. But I was into computers.

CK: Cornershop and Orgone: they have in common the DIY ethos—a trait of the 1980s punk American movement. Could you talk about the significance of the do-it-yourself stance towards making things happen?

AL: I think it's a very American attitude. Well that's not true at all but it was for my context – I guess in the US its mixed in with the odd American work ethic so things have a different feel in Europe. People our age are one generation young for all the funding – it had all dried up with Regan and Bush senior ; so, we witnessed a lot of organizations dying and there was just nothing. It seemed really important not to rely on those kinds of things [external support] and not to be institutionalized in that manner. If you wanted to do something and had the energy, that was the advantage of a place like Buffalo, you just did it. People were into it.

CK: What are your thoughts about the artist-curator?

AL: I haven't really gotten that down yet, but you know, Cornershop was the



project and that's why I never felt the need to show my own work there, —because I felt like it was one of the projects I did and that it connected to my own arts practice (it was educating me and I was looking at lots of art). And all the physicality of dealing with the space was very important to me. Though I had critical ideas about the diversity of work I wanted to show and the energy of the space, basically my curatorial measurement was, "Do I feel like mopping the floor for you when you're done?" "Yes"—then sure. But if I knew the person and I thought "No way!" then it was "No, you can't come" and that was fine; it was my place and I could make a decision based on that if I wanted to. I could be eccentric.

CK: How did Cornershop resonate with more established arts spaces in Buffalo?

AL: Really well; they were cool about it. I wanted to pay everybody, so I started to figure out ways how to get money through the university and also the other arts organizations— Each semester I'd make a small budget up for the poetics chairs (Charles Bernstein and Robert Creeley) and it really was shoestring stuff but it got everyone paid and supplies paid for. Then I would call another organization and say, "Oh, this person is coming, do you want to co-sponsor the event at my place?" and they always did. And Just Buffalo was regularly sponsoring the Scratch and Dent series first organized by Taylor Brady and then Graham Foust. I think that was special about Buffalo—that there wasn't a lot of competition; more like: "We need a scene and anything that can contribute to it will help."

CK: Cornershop hosted over 50 events and existed for a span of 3 years.



You've already talked about how you started with no guaranteed funding whatsoever, asking for donations at the door perhaps, and then eventually you did get some funding from various sources. Can you talk more about the reality of Cornershop's specific timing—and if you feel that there are any particular politics to the idea of temporariness?

AL: The idea of the temporary is really important. I've thought a lot about it, because I'm very interested in de Certeau's concepts of tactics and strategies. "Tactics" is this temporary thing that comes out of powerless spaces, spaces with no props that aren't "places", and "strategies" is something that comes out of an actual place. A position of power and presence. I think that Cornershop was something in-between: a very tactical experience that also had a very strategic location. I remember when I left there was a lot of pressure from people asking, "Who's going to take it over, what are you going to do?" and I was completely uninterested in that. I absolutely wanted it to die, because I thought that the energy of what happened would go somewhere else, and I think it did—lots of other things popped up and I felt no need for it to stay in the place it was. So, that was fine to me that it would just disappear. I never had a huge plan for it; I just needed it to run on energy, on the energy of getting things going and that was how things worked, —and, of course, I started to plan a little bit more as I got better at it. But the funding: one day Charles Bernstein said, "Maybe, you should have some chairs." I said, "OK, cool!" So, the poetics program bought some chairs for Cornershop and that was the first big thing that happened: people didn't have to sit on the floor.



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CK: Do you have an opinion on the future—and the roles played by artists—of the predominant culture of individualism v. the collectivism characteristic of Cornershop? You already talked about how Cornershop was part of your practice as an artist. It is the exceptional practitioner who devotes such huge amounts of energy and time to creating a communal atmosphere for everybody to reap the benefits of. What could encourage others to take on more collectivist projects?

AL: I'll start in the opposite track: since moving here [to England], I've met a lot of people who are doing similar things, like Kristen Lavers with The Taxi Gallery ([www.taxigallery.co.uk](http://www.taxigallery.co.uk)) , where she's got this taxi that is a gallery in the front yard. It's been a 3-year project. Her part of the project is, she's created this space that's part of the community where she lives— a totally residential area. She's given others the opportunity to use this very interesting space. Another example is Steven Eastwood with OMSK ([www.omsk.org.uk](http://www.omsk.org.uk)) . Encouraging students to make opportunities for each other and not to wait for a system to give them opportunity should be a part of every arts education. People can critique and recreate the art system while at the same time that they might be part of it,. I don't know. On one level, I think it's just personality; some people have a personality like that - to organize and energise - and some people don't—and it's not that much about politics or anything.

CK: Do you think that they're intricately intertwined: the personality of being energetic and do-it-yourself and wanting something to happen, so you make it happen?



AL: Yes, I do and I change what I just said - it is a politic. It is really political, that's true, in a way of not artificially splitting art and life categories. But it's also some people's way of experiencing the social—because for me it was a way for a kind of shy person to have a very social experience.

CK: Could you describe—as a shy person—typically how you might feel during the run of an evening's event?

AL: For example, it was really important for me to be the bartender and to run everything. I absolutely despise trying to just plain socialize, to do the talking thing, so it was much easier for me to be this person who was doing all these jobs during the event. I wouldn't have felt so comfortable just kind of being there.

CK: You staged events featuring established poets and artists and filmmakers, but then you also provided opportunity to the not so established. Can you cite an example of the latter?

AL: I thought Michael Dietz was amazing. I mean, I liked most of the work that showed at C-Shop , but I remember that that was a really great show.

CK: Could you describe it?

AL: He did an installation of things he built, and he carved a bathtub out of cardboard that was mounted on the ceiling and held by a foot carved out of a dictionary. Then there was a really fantastic Smiling Machine with a rubber [band] that went like this [uses hands to demonstrate concepts of widening and narrowing/opening and closing] and that was connected to a motor in the basement. It was really erotic and weird. It slapped against the floor. It broke



halfway through, but it was really Deleuze-ian. I don't think he thought of it that way, but to me it was really like a Desiring Machine. Then there was a small drawing. Oh, and then an old-fashioned rug made out of paper tulips. It was just a very intelligent, very materials-based show.

CK: What was Cornershop's most glorious moment?

AL: I don't think it's one moment; it's more thinking back I feel incredible about it. Lara [Odell] reminded me that I didn't always like it while I was doing it, but I forget all that. I don't think of it as one thing; I think it's nice to look at it as, "That happened for 3 years, wow!"

CK: OK, so sustained glory....

AL: But sometimes it pissed me off; I don't want to pretend that it didn't.

CK: What kinds of things would frustrate you?

AL: The day would be coming and I'd have to be down there mopping the floor and doing everything and I'd feel antisocial and I'd think, "Oh god, all these people are coming, why do they have to come over!?" I didn't really mean it though. And, I wouldn't want to come, but that's just how I am because I'm kind of, a pushmepullyou monster, and I've been that way since I was a child, so....

CK: What way!?

AL: Well, just kind of wanting social activity and then not wanting it. (You might not include some of this in the interview).

CK: This is a cheesy question, you can choose not to respond, but if you had to pick a metaphor for Cornershop, what would you pick and why?

AL: I don't know how good I am at metaphors, let me think...I don't have a



metaphor, but I think Elizabeth Licata did something quite good in that article [for *Artvoice*, a free newsweekly in Buffalo]. I wrote her an email saying, "I'm kind of just having parties at my house." She picked up on that and pointed out that it read as if Cornershop wasn't thought out, but that actually it was quite thought out. I wanted both of those ideas in it: the casualness of the energy—as if something would just come up (although occasionally that happened) , but that's a little bit bullshit because of course it was obviously planned and all this work went into it (this isn't really answering your question at all, but...): there was all the organization of getting people to come, there was all the press, there was designing the invitations, there was all the graphics, all the posters, there was posterizing, there was mailing them out, there was hosting the people who would come—so, it was a tremendous amount of work. I think sometimes people didn't know how much work went into it, because of the party feel.

CK: This is something I talk about all the time with people who put on events: the actuality of the amount of labor that goes into making things happen and its relative invisibility to those not directly engaged in the labor. Do you think it's impossible to comprehend all of the labor and effort behind the production of an event or a space if you never have experienced it yourself, or do you feel that people comprehend quickly the amount of work and that's why it seems the majority don't take the task upon themselves? Is it like there's a secret club of people who realize the labor and are committed to it v. all the others; how would you address that? [The popular expression "labor of love" is apropos here.]



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AL: Again, it comes to personality. I think there's a little bit of both; people just don't realize the labor because it's quite hidden. Seeing Steven Eastwood [staging the OMSK Roam event in London in July 2004]: he was working, yes, but on another level, you couldn't see everything that was happening; he was having to deal with so much. The labor just has to be hidden, because it wouldn't work if you were spilling it out all over the place. You do sacrifice your own work as you do it, and that's why the space or event has to become your own work. Otherwise, why are you doing it? —Which, I guess, would be different than being a pure curator. Now (with projects I've organized in England), theoretical context more directly influences how I compose an event, which is quite different than what I was doing with Cornershop, and I guess that's more of a traditional curatorial stance. I'm not sure how I feel about it.

CK: Since you closed Cornershop when you moved from Buffalo to England, would you say that you translated or transposed it into other activities, and, if so, what are they?

AL: I haven't done anything like Cornershop. I miss it a lot, and think that I would do something similar in the future. But I have concentrated more on what I do, my own work, and then I have organized stuff, but I've done it in collaboration and have a more theoretical and planned idea (Hybrid Discourse with Joasia Krysa [www.i-dat.org/projects/hybrid](http://www.i-dat.org/projects/hybrid))—doing conferences and symposiums—that's because I'm more officially part of institutions. I think I've transposed the cornershop energy into teaching: the way I curate classes and the way I bring people in when there's money is very much like how I did



Cornershop. Also I really try and support students creating happenings in the way I was supported in Buffalo. But I've definitely tried to organize things outside [institutional spaces], but yeah, they're quite different.

CK: Is there anything else?

AL: When I ran Cornershop, I did so because I just had to do it—and now I'm quite interested in placing it—I can't answer all the questions you're asking, because in some ways I'm still thinking. Just now, reading the Julie Ault book about NY alternative arts spaces in the 80s made me think about contextualizing Cornershop alongside things I didn't know about but that obviously were around.

CK: Could you be more specific?

AL: I'm thinking more about site, like Cornershop as a site in Buffalo. And site as not only a particular point but a convergence of context. You do what you do and you reflect back on something. I think I'm being more critical about it now, but I still see it as something that was evolving—it didn't have some big career goal to it, to what it was going to become, and that was really important. The big goal of Cornershop was that it should go for as long as it was fun, and if it wasn't fun, it should die.



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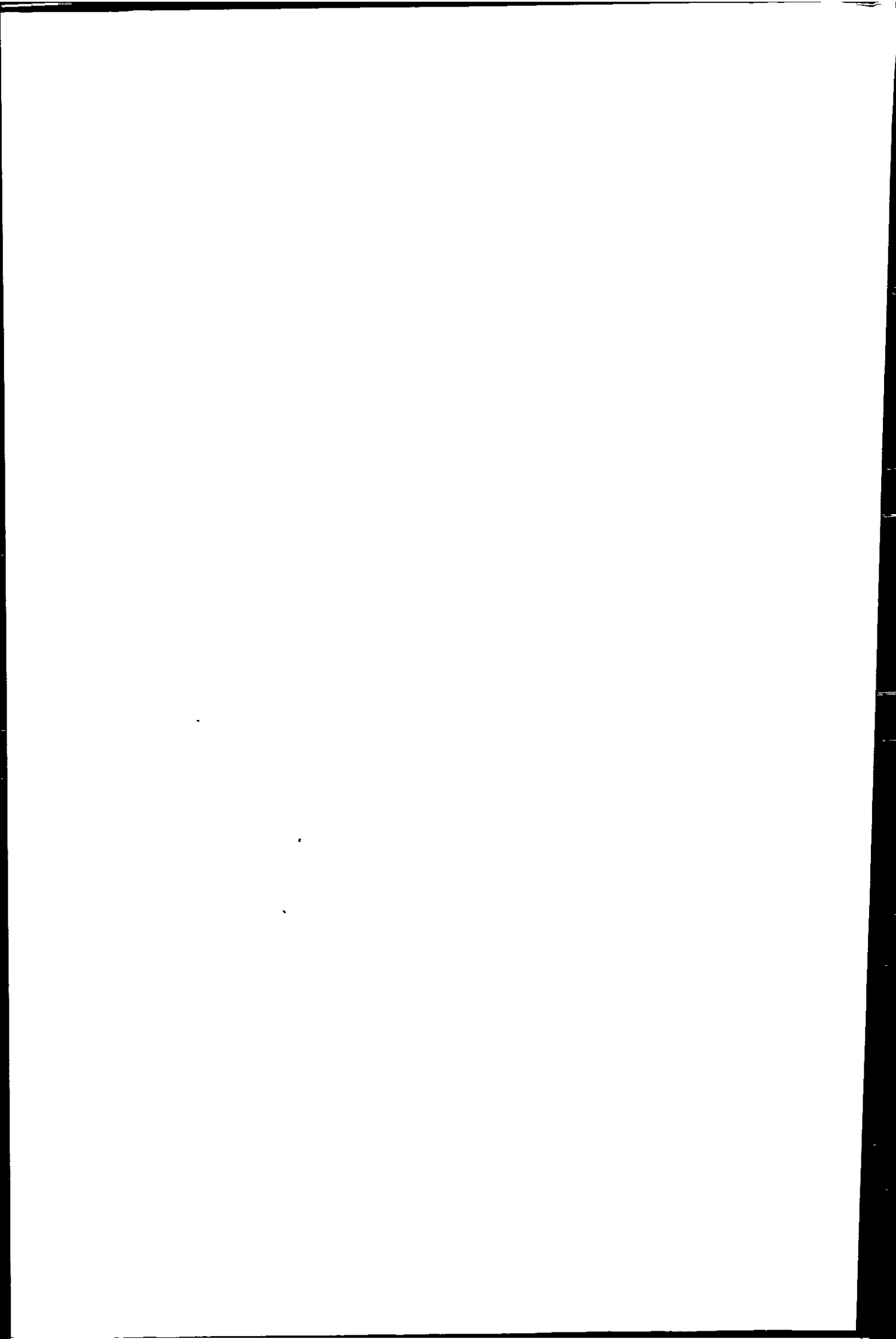
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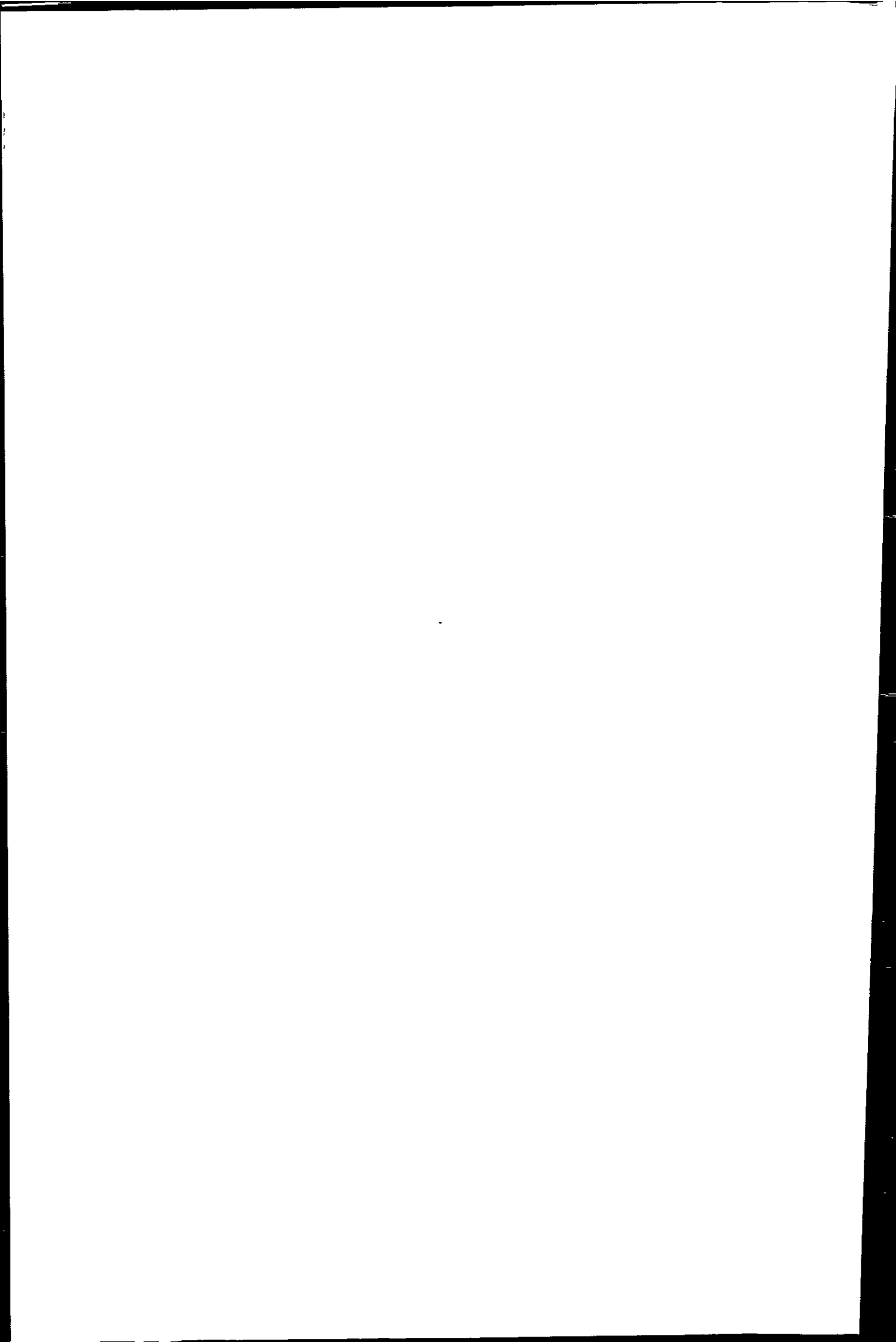
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